

HOW LOVELY IS THY DWELLING PLACE

————— *The Beauty of Myers Park Methodist Church*

JAMES C. HOWELL



LESLIE B. RINDOKS

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HOW LOVELY IS THY
DWELLING PLACE





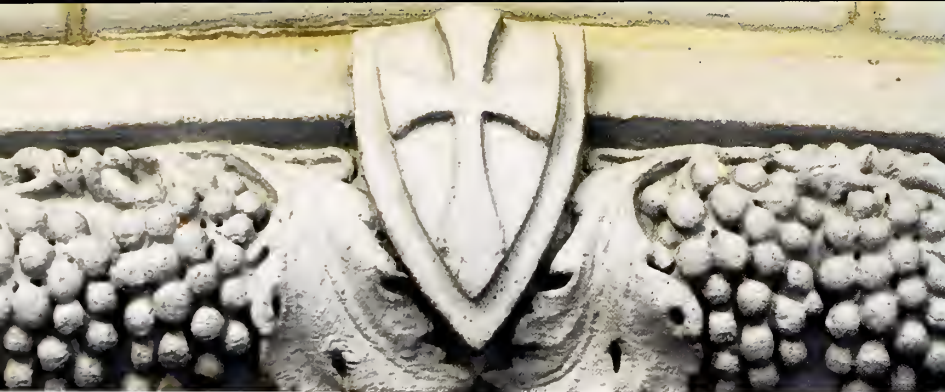
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————— *The Beauty of Myers Park Methodist Church*

JAMES C. HOWELL
&
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LORIMER PRESS Davidson, North Carolina 2005



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Design by Leslie Rindoks

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CREDITS

Quite simply, this project would not have been possible without the untiring work of two excellent photographers: Stephanie Chesson, who captured the stunning details of the sanctuary windows from high atop a scaffold and returned, throughout the course of many months, to record the ever-changing beauty of Myers Park Methodist Church; and John Daughtry whose commitment to exploring every nook and cranny – inside and out – has allowed us to experience the space from new and meaningful perspectives.

Dr. Tom Hanchett of the Levine Museum of the New South helped guide research early on, leading us to Marilyn Schuster, Katie McCormick, and Chris Gonyar at UNC-Charlotte, Special Collections. The architectural renderings featured in this book are from Louis Asbury's archives, as are correspondence from various stained glass companies and photographs of the architect. Construction photos and pages from the building specifications manual are from the archives of Beaumert Whitton.

The bride featured on pages 50-51 is Lee Anne Ebert Stone. Lucie Dulin graciously provided the needlepoint pattern reproduced on page 57.

To help identify the various Biblical figures and scenes found in the "Seven Virtues" window and in the twelve Apostle windows, artist Diane Araps provided the pen and ink drawings found at the back of this book.

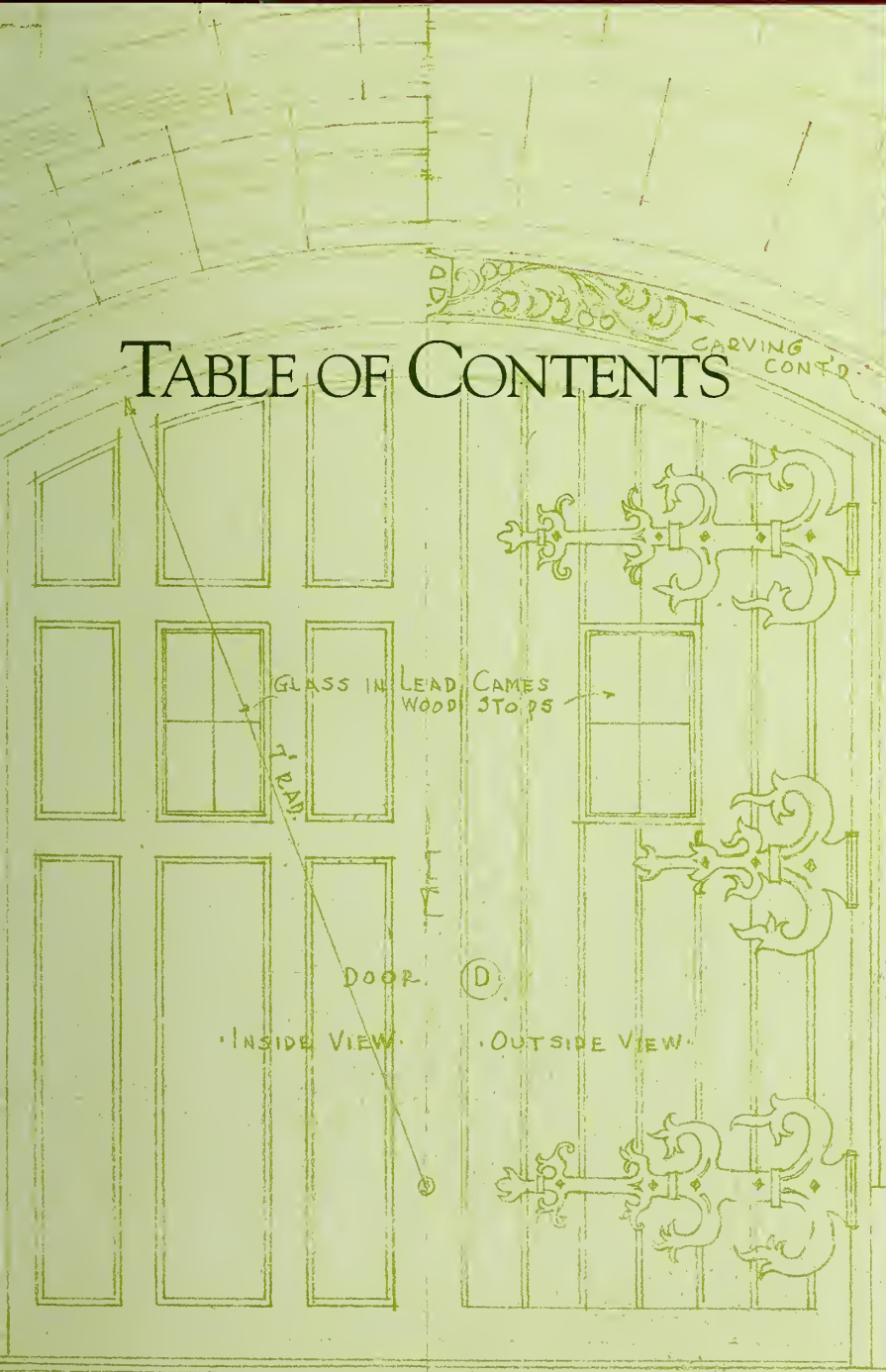
*The "ORDER OF WORSHIP" meditations are written by James Howell.
Other essays and supplemental material are by Leslie Rindoks.*

hOW lovely is thy dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
My soul longs, yea, faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh sing for joy to the
living God.

PSALM 84: 1-2



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DOOR "E" SIMILAR, EXCEPT SIZE IS 3'x8' (2)
AND RADIUS IS 6'



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FOREWORD

The handsome book you hold in your hands is a celebration of one of Charlotte's best-loved churches, Myers Park United Methodist.

Back in 1911, the celebrated Boston-based landscape designer John Nolen began transforming a cotton farm owned by the Myers family into "Myers Park," a residential suburb renowned throughout the South for its beauty. By the mid 1920s enough people had moved to its tree-shaded winding streets to start Myers Park Methodist and in 1929 stonemasons began work on the landmark sanctuary lovingly designed by architect Louis Asbury.

On the colored pages in this volume you'll meet some of the fascinating people who built and furnished the church, and you'll learn the meaning of the symbols that dot the inside and outside of the building. Photographers John Daghtry and Stephanie Chesson provided the pictures and Davidson author and award-winning designer Leslie Rindoks wrote the history and created the book design.

At the heart of the book are a series of meditations inspired by the church's architecture, written by Senior Pastor James Howell, author of many books including Yours Are the Hands of Christ, Servants, Misfits and Martyrs, and The Love That Moves the Stars. The essays – on the white pages – follow the "order of service" familiar to church-goers each Sunday, from Introit to Benediction.

You'll find that this gray stone sentinel offers a surprising visual treasure-hunt, with all manner of Biblical images from a pelican and a pomegranate to St. Peter with his golden key. But the treasure is not merely visual. At Myers Park Methodist, architecture intersects with faith to uplift and inspire us in the way of the Lord.

Whether you are just discovering Myers Park United Methodist or have worshipped here all your life, this book will open your eyes – and your heart.

Dr. Tom Hanchett, staff historian
LEVINE MUSEUM OF THE NEW SOUTH

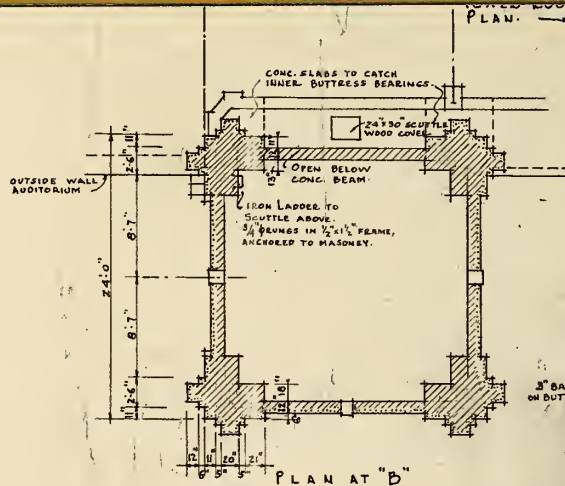


ELEVATION.

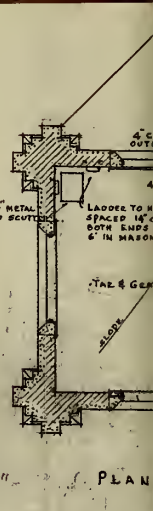
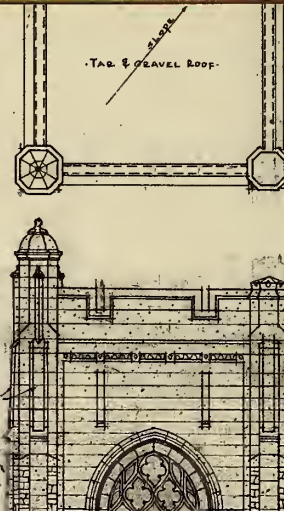
SCREEN-DETAIL.
SCALE - $\frac{3}{4}$ " = 1'-0"



SECTION.



PLAN AT "B"



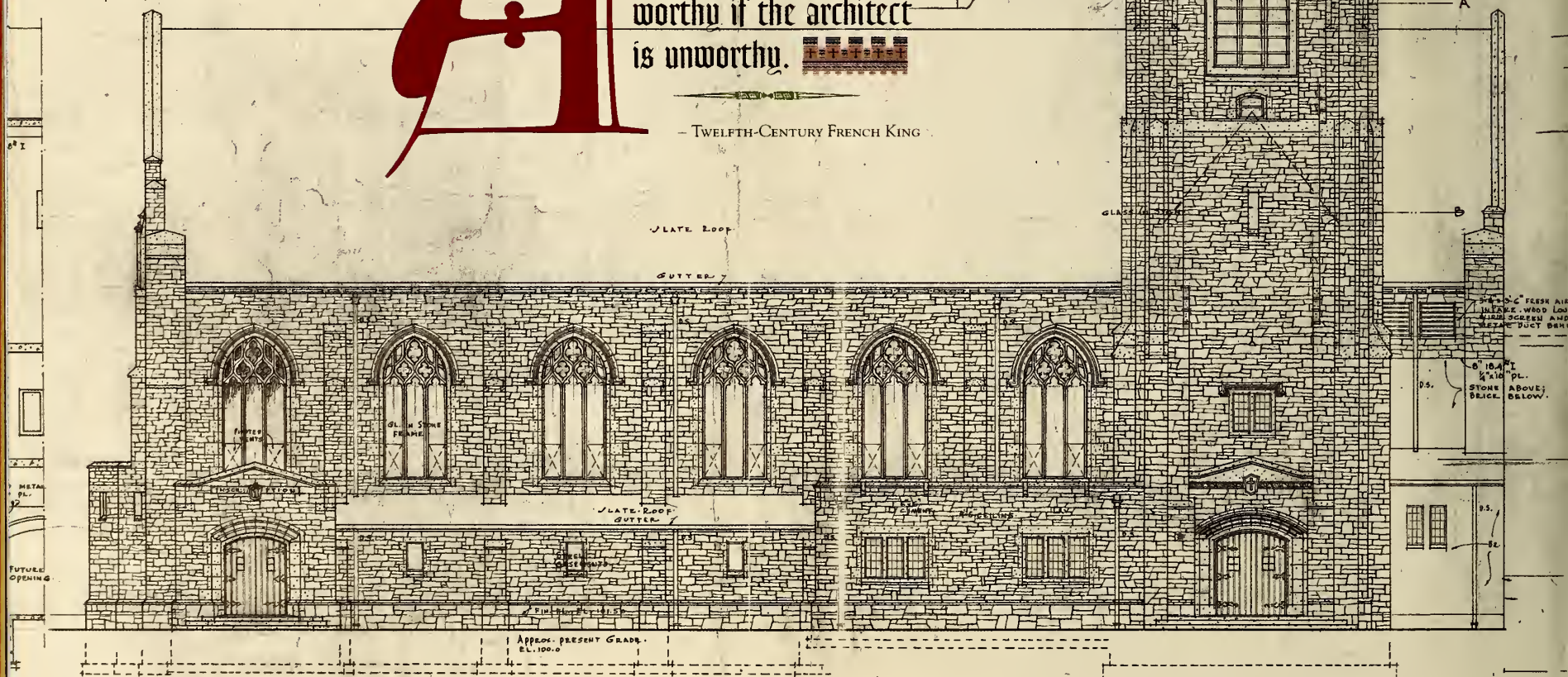
PLAN

A

building will never be
worthy if the architect
is unworthy.



- TWELFTH-CENTURY FRENCH KING



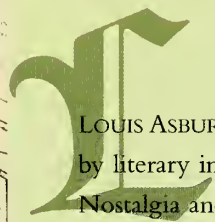
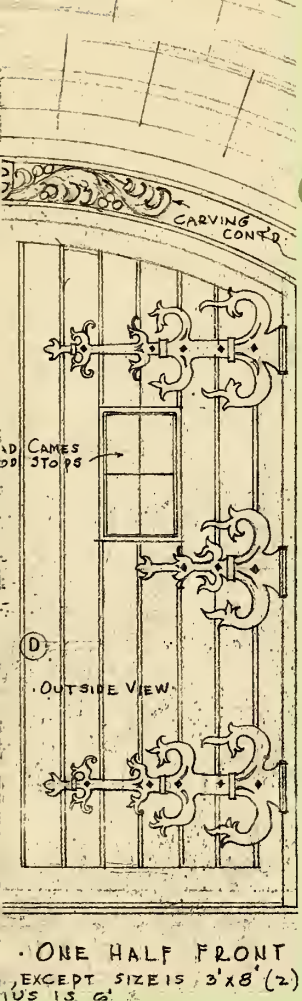
DRESSED STONE SHOWN DOTTED.



“A building will never be worthy if the architect is unworthy.” These words, from a conversation between a French king and his abbot as they considered appointing an architect in the late 1100’s, convey the importance of the role once known as Master Builder. A medieval architect was believed to possess “*scientia*,” or specialized knowledge. In fact, in medieval times, God was sometimes depicted as the architect of the universe, holding the world in His compass. In this view, the architect was more than a mere executor of a task.

Many centuries later, when faced with the same weighty decision, the Methodists of Myers Park commissioned Louis Asbury, Sr., to design their place of worship.

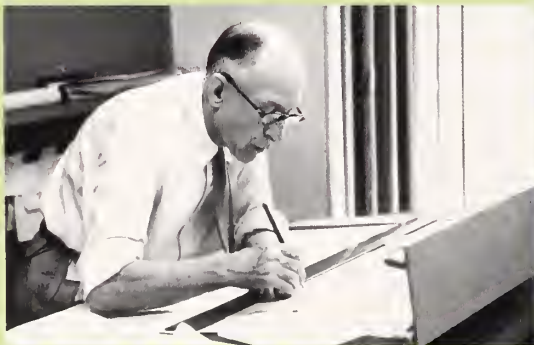




LOUIS ASBURY, born October 15, 1877, came of age during the latter years of the Gothic Revival. The movement, first sparked by literary interest in medieval romances, was in part a reaction against the creeping, yet unstoppable tide of mechanization. Nostalgia and mystery were its watchwords. The movement spread to architectural theorists who aspired to apply the liturgical significance of Gothic architecture to the issues of their day. Of particular influence were the writings of John Ruskin (*Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 1849 and *Stones of Venice*, 1853), who suggested that, "...Quality of medieval craftsmanship reflected a morally superior way of life." Asbury's architectural training, at Trinity College (now Duke University) and later at MIT, likely included a heavy dose of Ruskin doctrine.

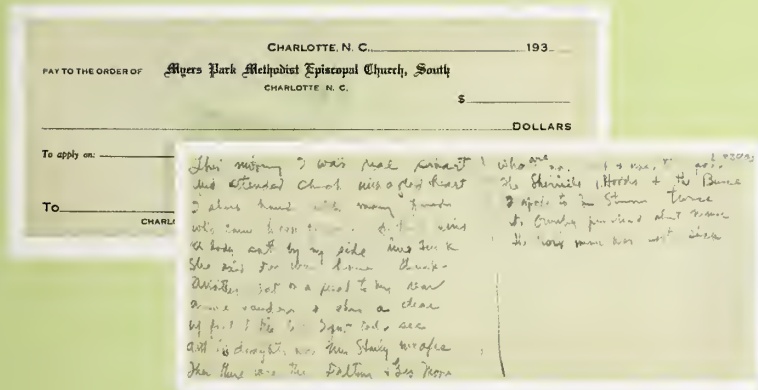
After graduating from MIT, Asbury worked for a time in New York and Boston. But in 1906, he and friend Bob Tappan set off on a quest to see firsthand the marvels of Gothic architecture. The two toured Europe by bicycle, studying the churches of England, France and Italy. It seems fitting somehow that in his book, *Discovering English Churches*, writer Richard Foster uses that same mode of transportation as a metaphor to describe the architectural monuments themselves.

"A parish church is rather like an old man's bicycle that has had three new wheels, two sets of handlebars, the pump stolen and replaced, and the frame repainted so many times that no one can count the colours — yet to its owner, it is still the same bicycle he bought all those years ago, a trusted friend and an object of great affection. So it is with our churches. As fashions and needs moved with the times, successive generations removed, replaced, restyled, and restored. The parts changed, but the church remained. The community held on so tenaciously to its spiritual focus that many of our churches stand today on ground that has been regarded as holy or magic for thousands of years."



Asbury and Tappan were not unique in their quest. As Foster writes, "Wandering along the aisles, peering up at the stained glass and browsing among the monuments, are people who would probably never dream of attending a church for regular worship. Yet here they are, drawn to an unfamiliar church, surely not by the smell of furniture polish and musty books, but by the appeal of the past and the need for a little peaceful silence in a noisy modern world."

In 1908, soon after his tour across the European countryside, Asbury married May Crosby and moved to Charlotte to set up his own firm.



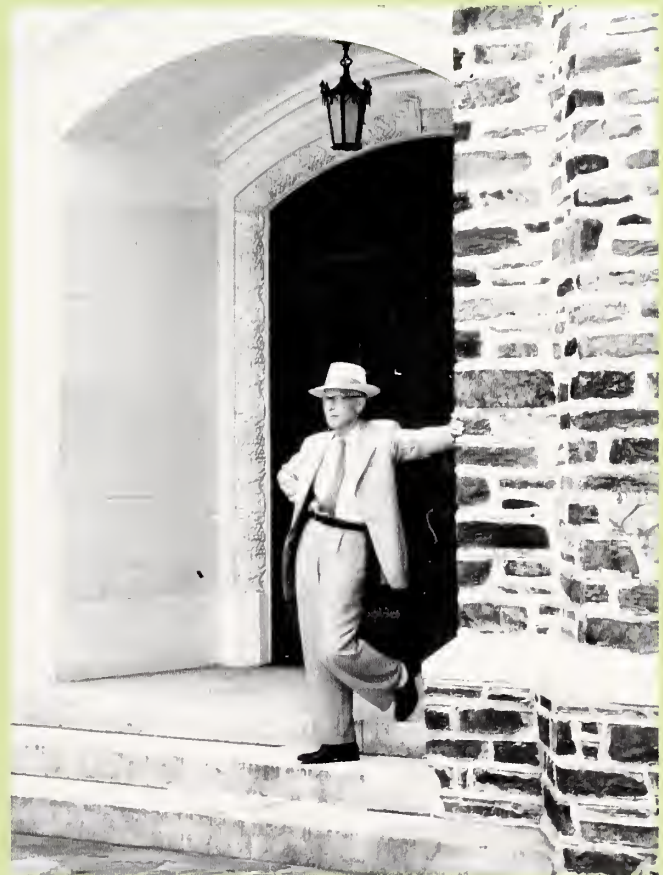
Also a spare-time poet, Asbury recalled, "While with the Federal Housing Authority in Asheville and Greensboro and while working in the camps during the war, I was, of course, away from home and often wrote my wife in rhyme...about all the news I could give then was about myself, - what I was doing, what I was thinking, and such. After my wife died I found she had saved some of these informing and foolish epistles..." He camped his rhymes on whatever was handy, including this blank check payable to Myers Park Methodist Episcopal Church, South Charlotte.

That Asbury maintained his love for the English Parish church is evidenced by the many pages he continued to tear from books and trade periodicals featuring Gothic architecture; his files contain hundreds of such clippings. (In lieu of paper clips or staples, he used straight pins to attach handwritten notes to many of them.) Even more telling is the fact that many of the architectural nuances that caught his eye were eventually expressed in his work. For example, a photograph of the church at Chipping Sodbury in Gloucestershire, England shows a bell tower quite similar to the one at Myers Park Methodist, including one extended rampart. Exterior features from the Hoar Cross Church and the Church of St. Mary in Clumber, England (both by architect G.F. Bodley) also share similarities with



Myers Park Methodist. Details, such as the carved rosettes from the altar and chancel end at Hoar Cross and a seemingly simple wooden door from the Rectory at St. John's Church, Lattingtown, LI, were re-created in Charlotte as well.

In 1930, the North Carolina Chapter of the American Institute of Architects bestowed the Honor Award to Asbury for his design of Myers Park Methodist Church.





And a great storm of wind arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. (Mark 4:37-39)



HOUSANDS PASS THE ARCHITECTURAL GEM of the Myers Park Methodist sanctuary every day. Some look up and marvel over the beauty. Many more pass, absorbed by the momentum of modern daily life.

What significance does this place hold? Is it a relic of a bygone era, a testament to a previous generation that believed in God earnestly enough to ensure that the most lovely human-made objects honored God? Or is it, perhaps, a window into the heart of a God who refuses to be pushed entirely off the field?

What happens in this place? Why are people drawn here to worship? Those who enter know, and those who never set foot in a church may suspect, unconsciously, that the rush of life, the accumulation of things, climbing the corporate ladder, and even enjoying robust health and fantastic friends are somehow not quite enough for us. We long for more, we feel something hollow inside. There is a homesickness in each one of us, and – if we are honest – a few fears that rattle inside: fear of death, fear of loneliness, fear of pointlessness.



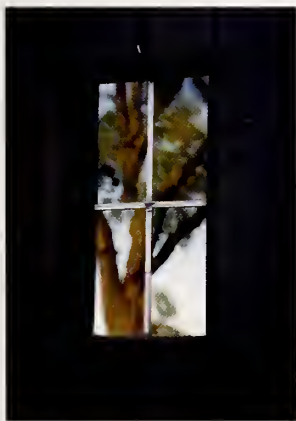
Artists have frequently imagined the church as a boat. Fitting, for the first friends Jesus had were fishermen by profession, familiar with life on the water, reverent toward the life-giving, and life-taking, power of the water. Once, a raging storm nearly splintered their boat and their lives (Mark 4:38). In their consternation, they suddenly remembered that Jesus was in this boat this day, so they found him. Asleep! Who could sleep in such a storm? Jesus, who was on intimate terms with the One who said “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:8), woke up, noted their panicked cries, calmly lifted a hand, and spoke to the wind and waves: “Peace, be still.” The Sea of Galilee settled down, and they drifted off to sleep. The fishermen knew they were in the presence of the very power of God, and that the Power cared for them, and brought peace to them. And therefore they were not even tempted to scramble back home to their old lives. Filled with that Power, they sailed off to the far corners of the world with a message of hope, love and faith.



Isn't this what happens in this place? Amos Wilder compared church with “the chamber next to an atomic oven; there are invisible rays, and you leave your watch outside.” Such a place should be adorned in creative, lovely ways, for God is not merely

beautiful. God is Beauty itself, and every glimpse of beauty we perceive is a small window into the glory of God. Consider this lyric by the singer, Jewel:

*I have this theory that if we're told we're bad
Then that's the only idea we'll ever have.
But maybe if we are surrounded in beauty
Someday we will become what we see.*



We mortals are drawn to beauty. When we see beauty, we want to be near it. We may not be able to possess it, and we don't even want to. We simply want to be near what is beautiful, for we find our true place by the side of, taking our place with, others who see beauty and admire it, praising it. We are drawn here to take our place with others who see, mysteriously, miraculously, the Jesus who

stilled the storm. And we no longer even bother trying to be the center of the universe. We are content to be in the circle around the center, satisfied just to be close to Jesus. We are surrounded in beauty. Someday we will become what we see.



LIVING IN THE DASH

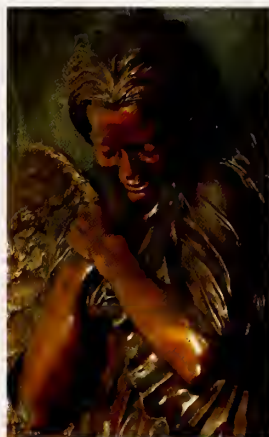
“And so he died, full of years” (Job 42:17)

My grandfather’s tombstone shows eight numbers with a little dash in the middle: 1904–1967. Peek under any such dash and you see years (and there never seem to be enough of them when you love the person). A moment here, an act there, a lazy afternoon, working past dusk, a trying week, a blissful month, a year of anxiety, three years of declining health, a decade on the best job you ever had.

Our attention spans are short (and getting shorter all the time) – but the Christian life isn’t this moment or that crisis or the worry *du jour*. God takes the long view: “A thousand years in Your sight are like a day” (Psalm 90:4). We never embrace our life with God until we stop, step back, soar up high, and gauge the broad sweep of time, in which this afternoon’s situation is merely a pebble on the beach, in which my entire life is a single measure in the triumphant symphony of God’s great composition of the universe.

How many years will I have? And what would make them “full?” In John Irving’s novel, *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, Owen mysteriously learns the date of his death, and his purpose in life is defined by his intrepid march toward that fateful day.

Today, if I am writing and you are reading, we are still in that dash somewhere – so how do we make sense of our own march, our own purpose, our own mortality? Being in the dash, we’ve lived a few years already.



In faith, we look back: Can you remember what God has done in your life? Rifle through the boxes of old photos in your memory and notice a hand, a smile, a circumstance, a moment, and notice what God has done to bring you to this place. There are wounds, too – and you go there, and let God’s healing mercy heal.

But like Janus, we look back, and then turn forward. As Christians we always have a future orientation. We are not yet where we are heading. I am not yet the person God intends. Today’s agonizing sorrow, or today’s heady success, will be eclipsed. Martin Luther King, coping with terrible setbacks, announced (the day before he was shot) “I am no longer optimistic, but I remain hopeful.” Optimism says everything will be better tomorrow; but hope is prepared for whatever happens tomorrow. Optimism depends on you and me doing better; but hope depends on God. We do not vest all our energy on this life, however zealously we may love or work or serve. Instead, we knead our time with an eye toward when there will be no time.

I care passionately about how I use the years abbreviated by that dash, but my ultimate identity is focused far beyond the years bracketed by the dash. “When we’ve been there 10,000 years... we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we’d first begun.”

So I can calm down now, and even look mortality squarely in the eye. For death is not a wall, not a prison, but a door, a gate, a vast opening that will make this universe seem like a pebble on the beach or a measure in the symphony.





Thou art Peter,
and upon this rock I will build
my church; and the gates of hell
shall not prevail against it.

And I will give unto thee the
keys of the kingdom of heaven.
(Matthew 16:18-19)



I REMEMBER A CHILDHOOD FASCINATION with a metal ring so jam-packed with keys that they did not hang, but instead, stuck straight out, radiating from someone's belt loop like the rays of a jangly sun. Clearly, that person could go anywhere – and you heard him coming.

It wasn't until I had a hefty ring of keys myself that I learned the truth. First, a big ring of keys is heavy. And second, while having lots of keys meant I could go practically anywhere, it didn't mean that I necessarily wanted to. The bearer of this ring of keys knew where the supplies were and could refill empty dispensers, replace cartridges and reload nail guns. The person with these keys could drive the (transmission-slipping) theatre department van and retrieve costumes, props, and set pieces that other people (like actors who couldn't be trusted with keys and directors who couldn't be bothered with them) were done with. The lucky key holder was expected to properly store all those things, keeping them safe for future use. I soon learned that the fewer the keys one carried, the better; true power lay in having only one key.

Possessing keys also means you must keep track of them. Who has not lost keys and then engaged in the panicked re-tracing of steps, the checking of every pocket, until at last they're discovered – in the refrigerator where you set them so you could put away the butter that you forgot Saturday at the grocery store and had to get today so you could make the easy seven-minute frosting that was anything but, and they're expecting the cake and you'd deliver it, except of course you can't find your keys...

Most losers-of-keys can relate to these lines of Elizabeth Bishop:

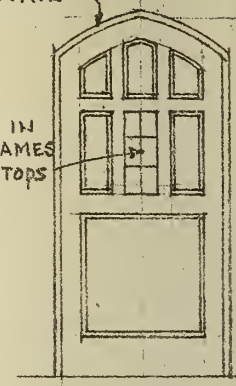
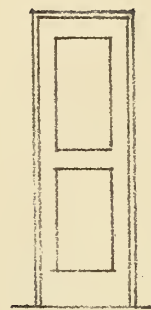
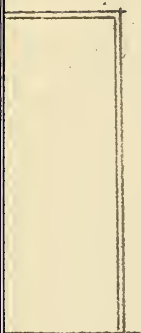
*The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.*

*Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.*

One Sunday morning, take a look at Peter and the key he holds; a key impossible to misplace – drawn large and fraught with meaning. “Thou art Peter...And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”

To master the art of losing, to aspire to have far fewer keys – and not for an obvious show of power – means giving up, willingly, the things that clutter our homes, our relationships, our lives, until we are left with nothing more than one key, a key with the power to unlock everything we truly desire.

But, the action does not stop here. Our goal is not one “Kodak moment” where we pose proudly, the prize grasped in our hands. For Jesus says to Peter – and likewise to us – as he offers the key, “You have a God-given authority to teach, and thus a weighty responsibility for the souls of people.” And so, we venture forth, providing shelter, securing doors, and locking out iniquity.



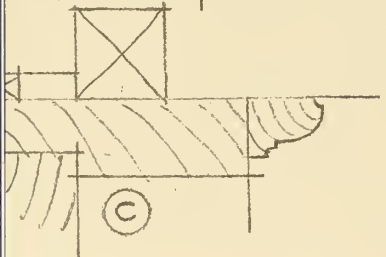
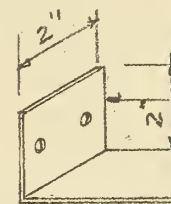
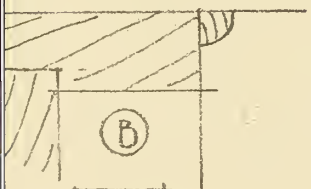
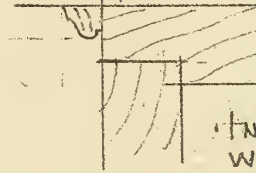
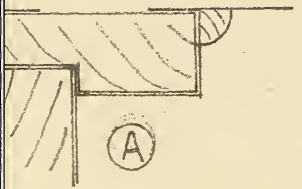
(A)
6'x7'x1 3/4"
METAL COVERED
DOOR & FRAME.

(B)
2'x6'-6"x1 3/8"
WOOD PAN.

(C)
3'x
SAS

(F)
2-2'-6"x7'x1 3/4"
GL. PAN.

(G)
3'-8"x8'x1 3/4"
GL. PAN.



ALL DOORS
TIONS IN
WALLS TO
STEEL AN

OPEN DOOR POLICY. Closed door politics. Back door neighbors. Don't let the door hit you on the way out. The shattering silence of a slammed door; the pounding beat of The Doors. Lee Anne Womack hoping when one door closes that another opens. *I am the door - John 10:9.*

Double doors. French doors. Screen doors. Barn doors. Impressive or lowly, doors are designed to keep some things in and others out. Doors are fascinating because they beg the question: What is on the other side? *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. Revelation 3:20*

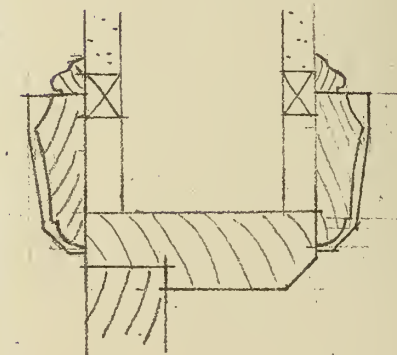
Door to door; lock the door; guard the door; *I would rather be the doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. Psalms 84:10*



GLASS IN
LEAD CAMES
WOOD STOPS

GLASS IN
LEAD CAMES
WOOD STOPS

SEE DETAIL



INTERIOR JAMB & TRIM
IN FRAME WALLS.



ONE HALF TOWER ENTRANCE. ONE HALF FRONT ENTRANCE.
DOOR "E" SIMILAR, EXCEPT SIZE IS 3'x8' (2)
AND RADIUS IS 6'

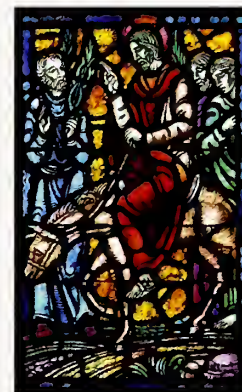


P

rocessional

AS THE CLIMAX TO THE HARVEST, perceiving life had just been extended by the sheer grace of God, pilgrims gathered in great caravans for the journey up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice, thanksgiving, and praise. Along the way, they would sing psalms in anticipation of their glorious meeting with God in the holy city. “My soul longs, yea faints, for the courts of the Lord” (Psalm 84:6). Imagine a band of two dozen weary travelers, scaling the crest of Mt. Scopus, just before sunset taking in the vista of Mt. Zion’s gleaming stones – and they would fall to their knees to weep for joy.

The sight was stupendous: tents dotting the hillsides, smoke from hundreds of campfires circling heavenward, the pivot of it all Solomon’s temple. A song was overheard: “Great is the Lord in the city of our God, beautiful in height, God in her citadels... Walk around Zion, count its towers, note its ramparts, recount to the next generation, ‘This is our God forever and ever’” (Psalm 48). The sounds and smells of a great throng, then the awful yelps and worse odor of animals slaughtered for sacrifice, trumpets blaring, cymbals crashing, torches held high, the formation of a splendid processional into the courts of the holiest building on earth, dancing,

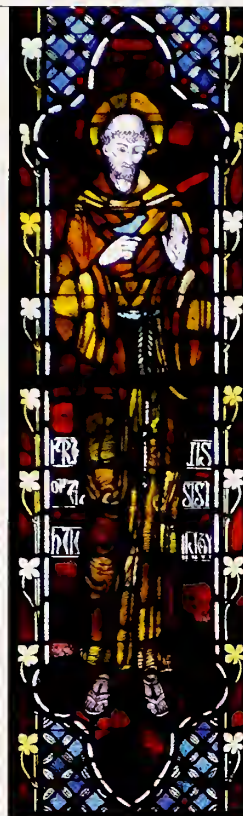


litanies, all on tiptoe, eyes straining toward the Ark of the Covenant carried aloft. More singing: “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts; my soul longs, yea fairs, for the courts of the Lord...” (Psalm 84). “Clap your hands, all people... God has gone up with a shout” (Psalm 47).



As a boy, Jesus joined Mary and Joseph in just such a caravan, and was awestruck by the beauty of God's house. When he was grown, he made his way back to the holy city of Jerusalem, but this time he wept tears of sorrow – for there was no zeal for God, nothing but people going through the motions, trying to use God for their self-indulgent gain instead of loving and serving their Lord. He queued up in his own, unofficial procession, riding a donkey – instead of a war-horse! – with children shouting “Hosanna!” and strewing the cobble pathway with fronds pulled from palms nearby. Jesus processed into Jerusalem, just as the Israelites had for centuries toted the Ark of the Covenant into the city, to fulfill God's will, to form a new people passionate to worship him in spirit and in truth.

Donkeys tend to wind up on the wrong end of jokes. But these humble animals bear burdens, and those who bear burdens are heroic – from the donkey who stood by the manger when Jesus was born and then carried him and his mother to Egypt to escape Herod's fury, to the donkey that threw Martin Luther to the ground



after lightning struck and Luther discovered his destiny as a reformer of God's Church.

In fact, every procession down the aisle in worship is emblematic of an eternal procession of the people of God, exemplary saints like Francis of Assisi, and those who have been forgiven of so much your head would spin to consider it all, women, men, previous generations, Christians from all over this planet, stepping forward, humbly, tentatively, but joyfully, full of anticipation, seeking a blessing from the Lord. “I was glad when they said unto me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord’” (Psalm 121:4).

For we are all of us pilgrims on a journey. This is not our final destination. Keats spoke of this world as “a vale of soul-making.” The Church is truly a door, not the stopping place, but a way to God, an entry point into eternity, when we will find our place in that great stream, that massive, raucously joyous procession of saints, sinners, children of God, beasts of burden, circling ever toward God's heavenly throne, to enjoy the Beauty of the Lord forever.

When St. Francis heard God's call to rebuild the church, to serve among the poor, to live a holy life, he had not the slightest desire to do so alone. Everywhere he went, he embraced others, invited friends to join him in the adventure. In fact, so many wealthy young men from Assisi left careers and possessions behind that the town fathers tried to quarantine them, so others would not be infected by this contagion!



ENTER TO WORSHIP



Community

Religious life in America today has become a private affair. There is a dogged individualism about our faith, even among churchgoers. Increasing numbers of people feel they can be Christian without bothering with church. But how lonely, how sad! Faith is something we do together, something that presses us up against people with whom we normally might have no contact at all, only to discover that with regard to what really matters, we are brothers and sisters in God's quirky family. I am saved to be saved with you, us together. We desperately need to connect with others at a deep, faith level. "God has and will continue to give us company so that we will know how rightly to worship... to make our faithful living possible

through that skill called memory" (Stanley Hauerwas). Or as St. Augustine suggested, to love another person is to help that person to love God.

We gather together for worship, not as one isolated person who might bump elbows with another person by accident, but as friends, as family. We speak of our "church home." Loneliness is shattered. We fulfill John Wesley's vision for what it means to be a Methodist: together we are a "company" of friends "having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation."

A BEAUTIFUL PATTERN OF TOGETHERNESS

Notice how many architectural and artistic elements symbolize this coming together. Lattice work is lovely, intricate, delicate – one strand interwoven with another, dovetailing against the next, in a beautiful pattern of togetherness, with open spaces in between, as if the various pieces can breathe, can give each other some space, but yet never leave each other alone. Love is like that; fellowship is like that.

Or vines and grapes. Examine a vineyard, or any viney growth. Vines are not very independent. They cling, they adhere, they interweave, as if feeding off each other, strengthening each other. And the fruit of the vine is the grape – but what grape ventures out on its own? Grapes thrive in clusters. And when we eventually come forward for the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we cluster toward the table and peer into the cup. Individual grapes find their destiny not as individual grapes, but blended together into the heady flavor of the wine, the tingling taste of the juice.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of the people of God as a vineyard planted by a loving Lord. Jesus said “I am the vine.” We grow near him, in a thicket with each other, producing fruit, not my fruit, and not your fruit, but our fruit, flowing out into life, a latticed work of art, always with room for yet one more.

Friendship is like that. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the hobbit Merrie says, “You can trust us to stick with you through thick and thin, to the bitter end. And you can trust us to keep any secret of yours closer than you keep it yourself. But you cannot trust us to let you face trouble alone and go off without a word, because we are your friends, Frodo.”



I believe in God the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only son our Lord:
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
the third day he rose from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at the right hand of God
the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen ♦





WE WOULD HAVE no Church at all had it not been for the brave public profession of Christians who, under interrogation, refused to bow down to the empire's gods, stood their ground and declared, "I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth..." and were executed for saying so. So drawn were they to the Christian message that they left their old, comfortable life behind and risked everything to be part of the Church.

In the early Church, those who expressed a fascination with the faith were instructed for months, during which time they fasted, abstained from entertainment and sex, and were prayed over diligently by the Church elders. The climax to the process came on the night before Easter. After an all-night prayer vigil, the new converts waded out into a pool of water, and were asked: "Do you believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth? Do you believe in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord?..." After being baptized, they were anointed with oil, dressed in a white robe, and given a drink of milk and honey, powerful symbols of their new life in Christ.



Each Sunday we gather to repeat the Apostles' Creed, we step into a long, steady river, the great two thousand-year story of believers, missionaries, and martyrs. To say "I believe in God..." is to realize I am part of something bigger than myself. My faith is something in me, my reaching out, my believing... but faith is also outside myself. Faith has content. I attach myself to something old. Modern culture fawns after novelties, the latest fads. Christians look at the world with old eyes; we cast our lot with a faith that has taken centuries to deepen, to be tested, to be proven worthwhile. Ultimate truth cannot have been cooked up just last night, and ultimate truth does not materialize in my mind in a flash.

The Apostles' Creed helps us grow into our convictions. To believe without the Creed would be like baking without a measuring cup, or building furniture without a measuring tape. We read the Bible, we sing hymns, we ask questions and reflect together on theology, and it is easy to miss the forest for the trees. What is at the heart of what we believe? We say the Creed in part to discover what we believe, and don't believe, to figure out who we are, and how to live.

The word *credo* means "I believe." Believing is precarious in modern times. We are proud titans of doubt and cynicism, and yet advertisers and TV shows make our heads spin over nothing at all. Faith is what I give my heart to. Faith is how I view the uni-

verse. Just as Copernicus forever altered our perspective so we see the world isn't flat, and the earth isn't in the center of things, so the Creed suggests there is a deeper dimension than the stage we normally stroll upon, and we aren't in the middle of things. God is.

"I believe" is not the same as saying "I feel" or "I want" or "I think," but rather, "God is" – and I fling myself upon God, I attach myself to God. Nicholas Lash wrote that, theologically, "I believe" is grammatically equivalent to "I promise": "I believe" does not express an opinion, however well founded or firmly held, concerning God's existence. It promises that life and love, mind, heart, and all my actions, are set henceforward steadfastly on God, and God alone."

A legend circulated in the early Church: after the Spirit descended on the disciples at Pentecost, Peter said "I believe in God the Father Almighty..." Andrew added, "and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord." And so they went around the table, a dozen disciples, a dozen sentences forming the Apostles' Creed.

A lovely (albeit fabricated) legend.

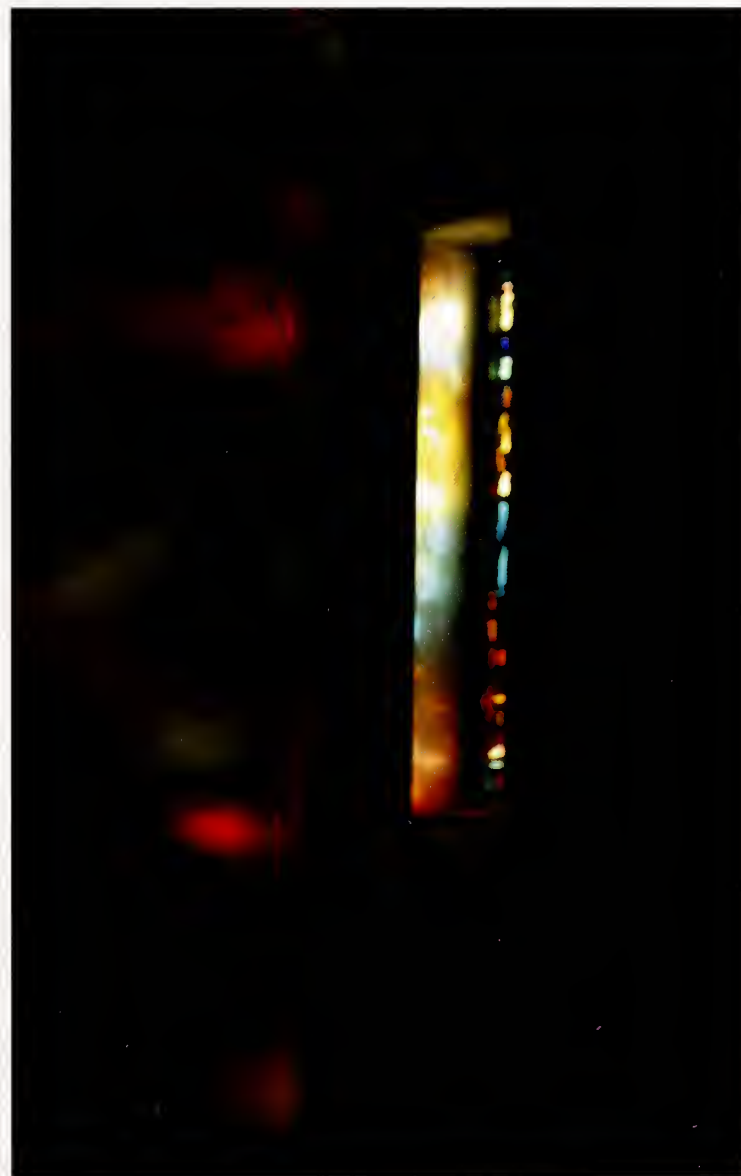
And yet this impulse to trace the Creed to the living characters of the Bible is on target. "What the Scriptures say at length, the Creed says briefly," Lash continues. The Apostles' Creed is a quick summary of the 66 books of the Bible, a bird's eye view of the high points of the story spanning



thousands of years. How easy it is to get mired in the 1,189 chapters and 31,000+ verses of the very long Bible; the Creed helps us get our arms around the big story, or perhaps the Creed helps the story of God's mighty acts to get God's arms around us.

Somehow in modern times, the whole idea of a creed seems arid, remote, as if some faceless bureaucrat is imposing upon free people who should think for themselves. The Apostles' Creed can become mindless, rote, pointless. And most people I talk with are eager for a direct, personal relationship with God, and aren't sure why they might benefit from a two thousand-year old creed. So let us underline how deeply personal the Creed can become. Evelyn Underhill noticed "how close the connection is between the great doctrines of religion and the 'inner life': how rich and splendid is the Christian account of reality, and how much food it has to offer to the contemplative soul."

So, the Creed is not a list of facts so much as it is an act of worship, an act of prayer. The Creed logic teaches us how our religious ideas hang together. "Words take meaning from the company they keep" (Lash). And the words take on their only valid meaning when our lives are changed. Our faith is something we do; our faith comes to life when we engage in those peculiar practices Christians count on to keep their minds and bodies in sync. It would be worse than futile to expend mental energy on the Creed while shielding our practical lives from transformation – which is our true worship.



WHAT WE SEE WE WANT TO MAKE SENSE.

—Owen Barfield



HUGE SHIFT IN THOUGHT swept across Europe around 1500 when scientific reasoning came to the forefront. Europe rejected its classical and religious heritage, and art became personal; its purpose: self expression and novelty. The idea of a mysterious and wondrous universe, created and controlled by God, fell out of favor. Nature was reduced to nothing more than an “object” separate from man. Man now stood at the center. Popular thought held that medieval folk clung to their faith because they didn’t understand the scientific facts of the universe.

Hundreds of years later, in the waning years of the Gothic Revival, C.S. Lewis defended the legitimacy of medieval beliefs when he declared that the Renaissance was nothing more than propaganda. Indeed, he said it never happened. Lewis fought chronological snobbery with the premise that new is not necessarily better. While he did not suggest that modern man could return to the medieval model, he refused to allow that any subsequent model could be much better. Every age, including today’s, uses a selective process; the medieval model used what was intelligible to the layman.

During the Middle Ages, humankind had relied primarily on the imagination to create works of art, art which existed primarily to glorify God. The imaginative process was not one of chaos, however, but one of intricate and complex organization. Older art sang the glories of the universe with its many rich and varied elements, and it did so within a context where all the contents were in har-

mony. Medieval artists and artisans used a common symbology to communicate. When a dog appeared in a painting, or a combination of fruits were featured in a stained glass window, or a fish was carved into the roodscreen, the viewer knew what each signified. Malcolm Miller, author and longtime tour guide at Chartres, encourages visitors to think of the cathedral’s stained glass windows as a sort of medieval comic book. The windows are the Bible, illustrated for the illiterate.

The *Physiologus*, a fifth-century catalogue of real and fabulous beasts, where mermaids and griffins were treated as seriously as lions and elephants, furnished woodcarvers with a rich and imaginative source of inspiration. Sometimes known simply as the “bestiary,” it was based on a natural history by the classical Roman author, Pliny. The *Physiologus* amplified Pliny’s descriptions by pairing creatures with Biblical texts and exemplary morals.

Flowers, fruits and vegetables, also common imagery, provided symbols for the cycle of life, death and resurrection in the fullness of the four seasons. As the produce of the earth, they bore the seeds for each new and successive generation. Generically, fruit indicated the abundance of harvest, fertility, and earthly desires. In Christian art, a specific fruit was an integral element of the theological intent of the image; for example, the combination of peaches, pears, and cucumbers represented good works, while the apple signified Temptation and the Fall of Adam and Eve.



I am like a pelican in the wilderness.

(Psalm 102)



Medieval people believed that the pelican, due to its excessive devotion to its children, pierced its own breast to feed its young. The physical reality which probably resulted in this legend is that the long beak of the pelican has a sac or pouch which serves as a container for the small fish that it feeds its young. In the process of feeding them, the bird presses the sac back against its neck in such a way that it seems to open its breast with its bill. The reddish tinge of its breast plumage and the redness of the tip of its beak prompted the legend that the pelican actually drew blood from its own breast.

The pelican legend, as interpreted in the *Physiologus*, is a little more gory and describes the accidental death, and subsequent resurrection, of young pelicans. As the birds began to grow, they flapped their wings in their parents' faces. The parents reacted by striking back, which killed the smaller birds. Three days later, the mother pierced her breast, opened her side, and laid herself across her young, pouring out her blood over the dead bodies and bringing them to life again.

This version of the action of the pelican became a particularly appropriate symbol of the sacrifice of Christ shedding His blood, and consequently the symbol of the pelican grew to be widely used in Christian literature and art. It has stood as a symbol of self-sacrifice and nurturing for centuries.

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey.

(Deuteronomy 8: 7-8)



AFTER A CENTURIES-LONG absence from everyday vernacular, pomegranates are making a comeback. The pomegranate, a fruit native to North Africa and West Asia, is about the size of an orange with a tough, reddish outer skin. Inside, its red pulp is chock full of seeds.

As we are conditioned to do with so many things, we are intent on discovering what pomegranates can do for us today. We carve through the tough outer flesh, wring the pulp for every drop of juice, and pulverize the seeds. In labs and kitchens alike, professionals use their inventive skills to harness the pomegranate's benefits for our betterment. And then, copywriters craft clever advertising campaigns with headlines like, "Floss Your Veins" to promote pomegranates' antioxidant benefits, and chefs introduce a new taste to tempt their patrons' palates, pushing pomegranate oil into the top ten of fusion cuisine's trendiest ingredients.

Thousands of years ago, men and women confronted this same fruit. They, too, took a blade and carved through the tough flesh; they held the bloody pulp oozing with countless seeds in their hands. To the ancient Greeks, the pomegranate's abundance of seeds and juice suggested the cycle of the seasons. The oldest surviving relic from King Solomon's temple is a small piece of ivory, carved as a pomegranate, a symbol of God's blessing, the hope of paradise. When early Christians savored a bite of the fruit, or sipped the juice, they tasted God's sacrifice and were reminded of His never-ending love. To them, the red flesh represented a cure for their human frailty; the seeds signified the resurrection.



Throughout history, monograms and abbreviations have served as decorative devices and identifications. The most commonly used initials in Christianity are Alpha and Omega (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet) which represent the eternity of God. The combined letters, IHC, are used to signify Jesus Christ.



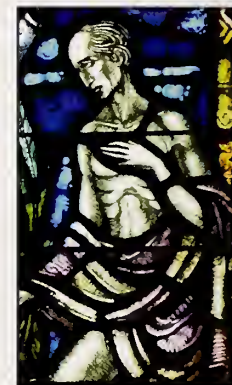


WE SEE A BEAUTIFUL CHURCH BUILDING. But what does it mean? Once upon a time in America, the churches were the tallest structures. Eighteenth century skylines were dominated by steeples and spires. Nowadays, the banks and the business buildings dwarf our sanctuaries – but we still can boast of having the most beautiful structures humanity has ever conceived or constructed.

Travel the world, and marvel at the beauty of sanctuaries. Tucked among more modern structures in Paris or Rome you can discover Sainte-Chapelle or the Sistine Chapel. Even after centuries of development, the cathedrals of Salisbury and Chartres still feel as if they stand in huge, open fields. Not that stupendous wonders like St. Peter's, York Minster, Duke Chapel, or Myers Park Methodist are the only kind of beauty. Drive out into the countryside of North Carolina, and just past a cow pasture you will see a little white A-frame, usually built by the hands of the guy who owns the cow pasture and his neighbor who plows the adjacent soybean field. The A-frame and the Gothic cathedral are both works of art, perhaps in the same way the integrity of a child's coloring and a Rembrandt both very much represent "art."



The Church is not just beauty; the Church holds beauty, presents beauty, bequeaths beauty. Of this mysterious phenomenon we call “beauty,” Elaine Scarry wrote, “You’re about to be in the presence of something life-giving, life-saving. It is not clear whether you should throw yourself on your knees before it, or keep your distance, but you had better figure out the right answer because this is not an occasion for carelessness or leaving your posture to chance. It is not that beauty is life-threatening, but instead that it is life-affirming.” Before beauty, I am vulnerable. Beauty reaches inside me, and yanks something out of me. Think for a moment: what are the two or three most beautiful moments in your life? At first blush, you may remember visiting Monet’s garden at Giverny, or seeing a rock formation in Arizona, or hearing a string quartet play Barber’s *Adagio*. But for the deepest beauty, think to moments when significant words were exchanged. You said “I love you,” and the other person, who could, willy-nilly, have dashed the fragile crystal of your self into pieces, cradled you and said “I love you, too.” An aged father explains to his son why things were the way they were, apologizes, and says “I am so proud of you.” Even in the middle of sorrow: someone we love has died, and the love is so precious we weep, we stagger, we hang on to each other and speak words that matter.



The Church is like a big Ark of the Covenant bearing beautiful words that matter. When God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai, those words were deposited in a sacred box for safekeeping, and the Israelites toted those words inside that box everywhere they went, and to go anywhere without those words spelled disaster. When they finally built the temple in Jerusalem, it was designed to be a permanent ark, big enough to hold not only the words, but also the people for whom the words were the bread of life.

The Church is like some manger, and swaddled inside is Jesus, "Fairest Lord Jesus, beautiful savior." The Word made flesh, the bread of life, is what we come into this place to hear, to digest.



We are nourished as we hear the Scriptures read. They are, to us, like a surgeon's scalpel, cutting out of us that which will be our undoing if we leave it untreated. The Scriptures are, to use John Calvin's image, corrective lenses. Our vision is blurry, but as we immerse ourselves in the Bible, in its stories, in its songs, in its prayers, in its commandments, in its promises, we begin to see clearly. God comes into focus, and we begin to see ourselves clearly,

and also the world around us. We see objects and faces and situations we would never notice otherwise.

The very beauty of God, hidden and revealed simultaneously in the cross, is perhaps voiced in a Saxon poem from early in the Middle Ages. "The Dream of the Rood" in its 155 lines imagines the cross telling its story.

"I was a sapling at the edge of a wood. Soldiers came and cut me down, stripping my branches, staking me in the ground to serve as an instrument of execution. But there came to me no criminal, but the young Hero. They nailed him to me; his sweat and blood soaked into me. I trembled, but dared not bend. After he died, they took him down and threw me into a pit. But years later they dug me up, and adorned me with jewels and decked me with gold, and now I rise high above the earth, with the power to heal all who bow before me."



Why does this beauty matter? Because despite our wariness we all want to give the fragile crystal of ourselves away to what is truly Beautiful. Because we love, and lose, and long. Because the world's faked lies have been exposed. Because we look at our hands and we no longer want to say "I'll do with these as I wish!" but we want to say "Beautiful Savior, my hands are really yours. Do with them as you will. I want to be good, I want to be shaped by your Beauty." Listen to this marvelous thought from Stanley Hauerwas: "We must be attracted by a beauty so

compelling we discover lives not our own. Such a discovery comes through suffering and takes time, because we do not give up our illusions easily. Liturgy is, quite literally, where we learn to suffer God's beauty and, so suffering, discover we are made in God's image. Through worship we discover the truth about ourselves, making possible lives of goodness otherwise impossible. The beauty, the goodness, and the truth of our liturgy are tested by our being sent forth. If we are not jarred by the world to which we return, then something has gone wrong. The beauty we have beheld in the gift of God's Son leaves its mark. Formed by such beauty we no longer desire to live by the lies that would have us call lies true, evil good, and ugliness beautiful."

*Many of the Disciples were fishermen, and when Jesus commissioned them he evoked an image from their life of labor:
"I will make you fishers of men."*

The fish eventually became a powerful symbol in early Christianity, in part due to the acronym: ΙΧΘΥΣ — the first letters in Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior (Iosous Christos, Theou Uias, Soter). The word in Greek, ΙΧΘΥΣ, coincidentally means fish.

In times of persecution, the fish symbol was used as a way to identify fellow Christians. When two people met, one would draw the upper arc in the sand and the other person could identify himself as a Christian by drawing the bottom arc, completing the sign of the fish.





During the Middle Ages in England, possessing an English translation of the Bible was forbidden. The Church feared that its authority would be diminished, even challenged, if ordinary men were allowed to read the Bible and interpret it for themselves.

Around 1370, John Wyclif argued against the notion that man required a mediator to maintain a relationship with God. Instead, he believed that the church should function as a teacher for the laity and that clergy should set a living example for their congregations. Wyclif called for a service in English and produced the first complete translation of the Bible in the common tongue.

After Wyclif's death in 1384, his followers and enthusiasts (who were known as Lollards) continued to support and spread his beliefs. Despite their efforts, possession of an English Bible was considered to be evidence of heresy for more than another century.



Southeastern Construction Company

210 WEST SECOND STREET,
Charlotte, North Carolina

July 15th. 1929.



Mr. Louis
1514 East
Charlotte

Dear Sir,

Wadsworth
ware for
this order
should be

EW-M.

CC to R.

anchoring, to the architect for approval.
81. All workmanship shall be of the best by experienced workmen and cutting, bedding, jamming, bonding, belting, anchoring, painting, and clearing shall be done according to the best practices.

82. Protect stone after set and clean where necessary upon completion of the work.
83. Rear wall of church to be of hard burnt red brick above grade painted two coats gray where exposed.

84. Except as above specified all outside walls, buttresses, etc. of the entire church above grade is to be veneered with stone delivered F.O.B. to Charlotte by the Building Committee. Same to be Rammed Rubble with hammer-dressed joints and stone to be generally laid so as to appear to lie on natural beds. Sample wall to be laid for approval of the Committee.

85. The Character of joint to be determined at the site. Stone to run 4" to 8" thick and to be bonded into work.

86. Where directed support stone brickwork over openings, where not on steel angles.

GRANITE.

87. The four main entrances have Mt. Airy Granite steps, six- Same to be slightly beveled to run



All work is to be framed in the best and strongest manner, true and plumb...

-p. 24, Building Specifications



“CHANGING THE SKYLINE OF DIXIE”

More than one of Louis Asbury's architectural concepts was realized through the efforts of Earle Whitton's Southeastern Construction Company, including the building of Myers Park Methodist Church. Southeastern's brochure declared that the company was "Changing the Skyline of Dixie." And so they did, brick by brick, stone by stone, and page by page of neatly typed specifications.

Within many professions there is often a manual, or one particular book, that is referred to as "the bible." For car mechanics "Chilton's" is the definitive source of knowledge. Seafarers rely on "Chapman's Piloting" for navigating the waterways. The crews that built Myers Park Methodist had their own manual. Produced long before the advent of "cut and paste" features of the modern word processor, the lengthy manual was hand-typed. A set of onion skin carbons survives as part of Asbury's archives.

Of utmost concern to architect, contractor and building committee alike was the exterior stone. To say that everyone concerned was serious about the stonework would be an understatement. They were *passionate* about the stonework. Asbury's drafters rendered every stone in the elevations. The building committee reserved the right to inspect, and reject if necessary, a sample wall. Even when it came time to expand the facility in the early 1960s, Whitton, contractor for this project as well, maintained strict quality control over the stonework.

For decades, he bemoaned the fact that two panels were less than a perfect match.

Just as in the Middle Ages, building quality was dependent on the careful choice of materials. Quarries, and the proximity to them, were crucial. The quarry of choice for Myers Park was in Hillsborough – the same quarry that had provided stone for Duke Chapel. The availability of this stone was made possible through arrangements made by J.B. Duke, whose daughter Doris attended Sunday School for a time at Myers Park Methodist. Building specifications note that the exterior walls were to be constructed of Hillsborough stone and:

...veneered with stone delivered FOB cars Charlotte by the building committee. Random Rubble with hammer dressed joints and stone to be generally laid so as to appear to lie on natural beds. Sample wall to be laid for approval by committee...All trimming stone, copings, caps of tower, window tracery, sills, jambs and lintels, etc. are to be artificial cast stone to imitate Buff Indiana Limestone...The four main entrances will have Mt. Airy Granite steps.



PLINI SUNT COELI

GLORIA TUA

יהוה

S. Deus Sabaoth

Gloria in excelsis Deo

Agnus Dei In monte Sion.
Apo. 4.

Vbi laus honor et gloria Dei Patris in secula amen

1. Chor. 4. 5. 6. vel 7. voc.

2. Chor. 4. 5. 6. vel 7. voc.

Venite, exultemus
Dño:

Jubilemus &
Deo saltari nro.

Invenit
qui genuit
et docuit
et docuit
et docuit

Sanctus
in die fuerit

Prallus Dño qui

ET TERRA

habitat in Sion,



THE MAGIC OF WORSHIP is that, in this place, people come to know and experience joy. Outside we may develop some expertise at having fun. But joy is different. Joy isn't happiness times two, or a really tall pile of fun. Joy is counter-cultural, and is downright scandalous in a world hardened by cynicism. Joy is a defiant smile in the face of the worst bad luck, for joy is the Spirit's whispered secret that we are nestled quite securely in God's loving hand. Joy can weather unhappiness. In fact, joy is frequently discovered in the middle of sorrow. The widow smiles at the sight of her childhood friend's tears while they lift their voices at the funeral, singing "'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far / and grace will lead me home." Praise is the antidote to despair.

In one sense, we choose joy. We forever stumble upon some fork in the road, and we can choose joy, or choose to be resentful. And yet the very choice of joy is a gift of the Spirit, who is forever beckoning, coaxing me toward joy. Joy is a gift. Joy withstands any and all agony. Joy flowers in a dark, barren place. Joy is inflamed by the way we worship – but nowhere is joy more evident than in our singing, in the great hymns of the Church, in the anthems of the choir.



Music has always been at the heart of the Christian pilgrimage. The earliest Christians sang, and whenever the Church has needed an awakening, music has helped it happen. Martin Luther knew music's power to heal and encourage. For him, there was nothing like a good hymn to drive away the devil! Luther had encouraged the use of hymns in the vernacular, and wrote a few himself, most famously "A Mighty Fortress," written at a time of profound depression in his own life. Hear this earthy saint:

Music is a fair and lovely gift of God which has often wakened and moved me to the joy of preaching... I have no use for cranks who despise music, because it is a gift of God. Music drives away the devil and makes people gay; they forget thereby all wrath, unchastity, arrogance and the like. Next after theology I give to music the highest place and the greatest honor... This pre-

cious gift has been bestowed on men alone to remind them that they are created to praise and magnify the Lord. But when natural music is sharpened and polished by art, then one begins to see with amazement the great and perfect wisdom of God in his wonderful work of music, where one voice takes a simple part and around it sing three, four, or five other voices, leaping,

springing round about, marvelously gracing the simple part, like a square dance in heaven with friendly bows, embracings, and hearty swinging of the partuers. He who does not find this an inexpressible miracle of the Lord is truly a clod...

Methodists have been prolific hymn-writers, especially Charles Wesley, who composed more than six thousand hymns! His hymns were "not the product of a lively imagination...nor were they the fruit of hard mental toil. They were the spontaneous effusions of his heart." From that heart we have learned to think of Jesus as "lover of my soul," to harken to "the herald angels" at Christmas, to long to have the absurdly high number of "a thousand tongues to sing my great redeemer's praise." This latter hymn stands as the first in virtually every collection of Methodist hymns. On the day of Pentecost in 1738, Charles attended a Moravian service, and at midnight gave his life to Christ – less than a week before his brother John's more famous Aldersgate experience of the "heart strangely warmed." "O For a Thousand Tongues" (stretching to 18 stanzas!) was written to commemorate that conversion. Wesley's goal was "to arouse sinners, encourage saints, and to educate all in the mysteries of the Christian faith." Charles Wesley understood that hymns were not just inspirational, but also educational. He used contemporary folks tunes, melodies from Italian opera, as well as oratorio (especially favoring Handel). It was by the singing of hymns that the early Methodists learned theology, were reshaped as people of faith, and catapulted into the streets in mission.

God has blessed us with so many great hymns and hymn-writers. After worship one Sunday, eighteen year-old Isaac Watts was complaining to his father about the deplorable singing and dreadful hymnody. His father said, "Well then, young man, why don't you give us something better to sing?" And he did, writing one per week, to the enthusiastic reception of the congregation. Imagine sitting in a pew, sight-reading the local boy's hymn of the week, such as "O God Our Help in Ages Past," "Joy to the World," "Jesus Shall Reign," "Am I a Soldier of the Cross," and "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross."

Fanny Crosby, blind by the age of six weeks, wrote over 8,000 hymns, including "Blessed Assurance," "To God Be the Glory," "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross," "Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior," and "Rescue the Perishing," which emerged out of her work at a New York city mission.

"Silent Night" rather famously was written by Franz Gruber when the organ broke down on Christmas Eve, 1818, at St. Nicholas in Oberndorf, Austria. But its power was nowhere better dramatized than during two World Wars, when soldiers lay down their arms, crossed "no man's land," and joined their voices and hopes around the "holy infant so tender and mild."

Harry Emerson Fosdick, one of the twentieth century's stalwarts of the pulpit, wrote "God of Grace and God of Glory" at his summer home in Maine, planning for it to debut as the processional hymn at the very first worship service at the resplendent Riverside Church in New York on October 5, 1930. The Church had been built near Harlem, and was intended as a bulwark for a

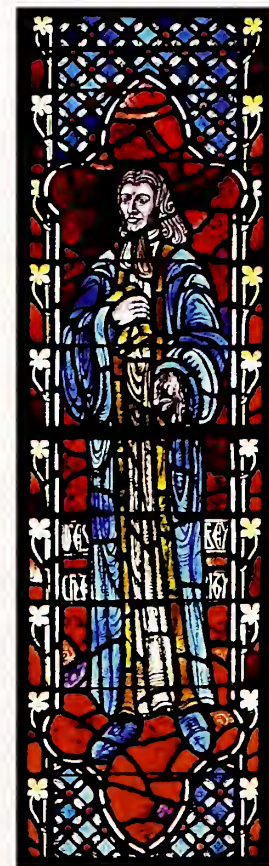
socially conscious Christianity that could criticize wealth and care for the poor.

In 1985, Natalie Sleeth wrote the exquisite "Hymn of Promise," which was immediately well-received as a new hymn. But shortly after its composition, her husband Ronald was diagnosed with cancer. He asked her to have "Hymn of Promise" sung at his funeral – and it moves many of us to sentiments of hope both today and as we contemplate our earthly end.

On his deathbed in 1791, with a handful of friends gathered to wait and watch, John Wesley surprised everyone, ending a long silence by breaking into song (from a hymn by Isaac Watts):

*I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,
and when my soul is lost in death,
praise shall employ my nobler powers.
My days of praise shall ne'er be past...*

Had we been able to ask Wesley what he would be doing two or three hundred years after his death, he would confidently have answered with those same words. To contemplate this unending employment in praise, the gradual addition of fresh voices, the grandest talents, the holiest hearts: it staggers the mind – and

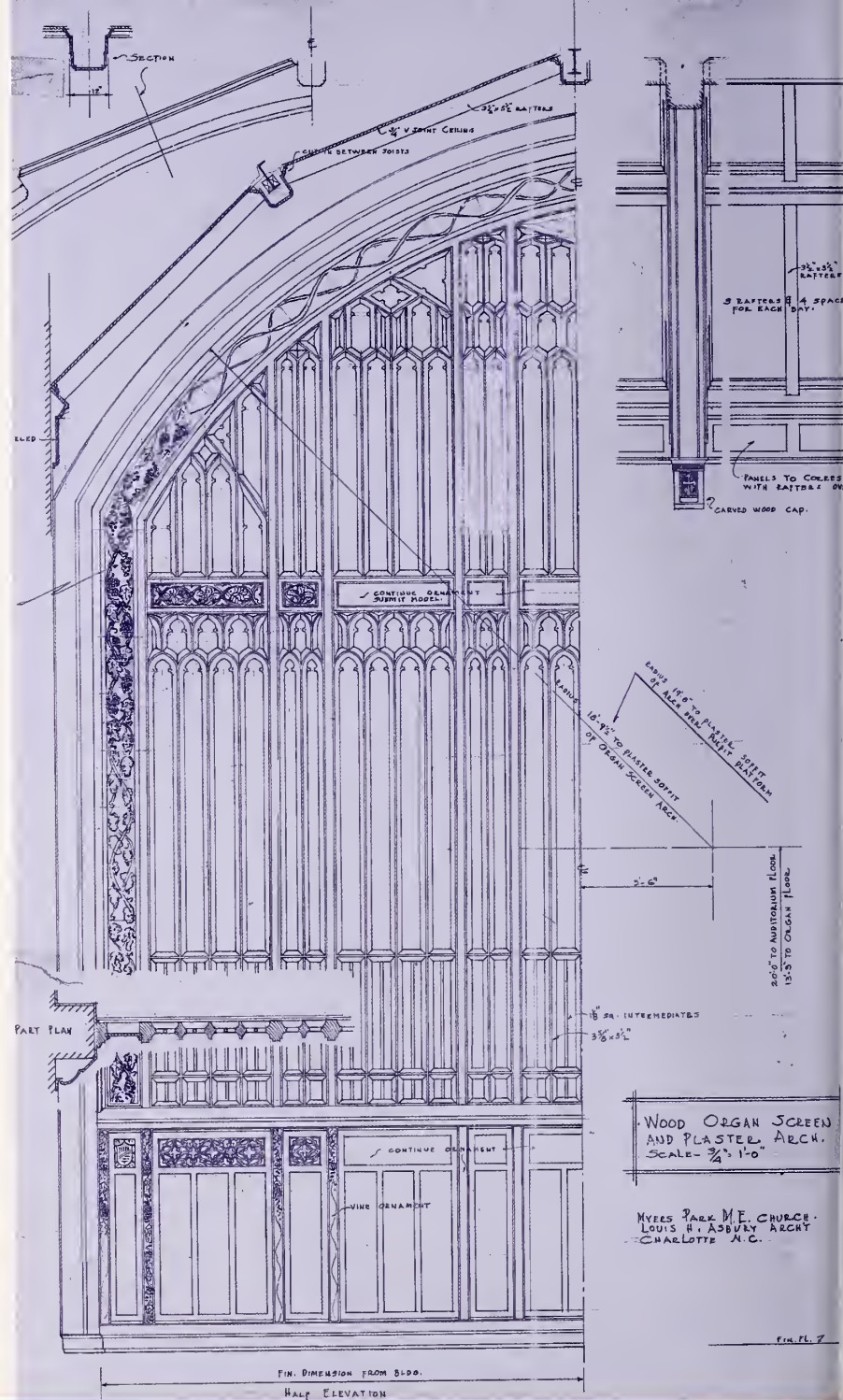


thrills the heart. In his play, *Amadeus*, Peter Shaffer imagined Mozart thinking out his plan of composition:

I tell you I want to write a finale lasting half an hour! A quartet becoming a quintet becoming a sextet. On and on, wider and wider – all sounds multiplying and rising together – and then together making a sound entirely new! ... I bet you that's how God hears the world. Millions of sounds ascending at once and mixing in His ear to become an unending music, unimaginable to us! That's our job! That's our job, we composers: to combine the inner minds of him and him and him, and her and her – the thoughts of chambermaids and Court Composers – and turn the audience into God.



With the original configuration of the chancel, the choir loft faced the congregation.



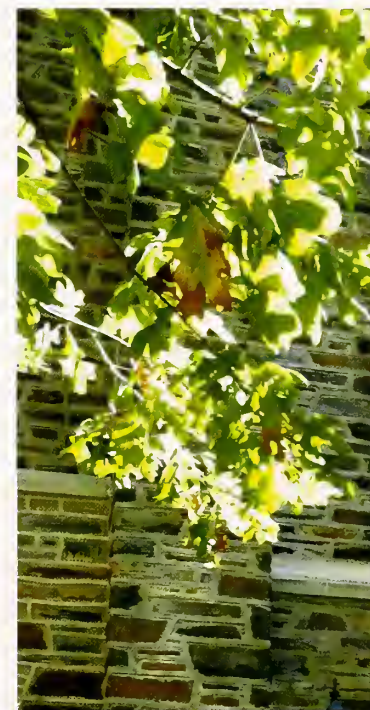


Think about a choir. Men, women, children gathered, each with a distinctive voice, but working to join those voices into a single harmonious anthem. What could more beautifully mirror what our eternal life with God will be like? My

voice is there, my voice matters, but my goal is not to stand out or overwhelm the rest, but to find my place in the choir, to be one of a vast host praising God here, tomorrow, everywhere, forever.

For our singing is our hope, our best chance to be God's people in a culture that does not foster the love of God. While still in seminary, a young preacher brought his girlfriend, a pretty soprano named Coretta Scott, home to meet his parents. Martin Luther King Jr.'s next sermon was entitled "How a Christian overcomes evil," and it was punctuated by an illustration from mythology. The sirens sang seductive songs that lured sailors into shipwreck. Two men navigated those treacherous waters successfully – and King contrasted their techniques. Ulysses stuffed wax into the ears of his rowers and strapped himself to the mast of the ship, and by dint of will managed to steer clear of the shoals. But Orpheus, as his ship drew near, simply pulled out his lyre and played a song more beautiful than that of the sirens, so his sailors listened to him instead of to them. Everything is at stake in the song we hear: safety or shipwreck, good or evil, enslavement or freedom. And we have the beautiful song, the beautiful savior, and we can trust the song, we can count on the melody to lead us through.

Even in the toughest of times. To downtrodden Israelites, who were on the edge of despair, just about to abandon all hope, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah and declared, "A branch shall spring forth from the root of Jesse." We have heard this in Handel's *Messiah* so often that we take it for granted. But we are talking about a stump, a tree that has already been cut down, that is good for nothing but to be sat on. But watch old wood that you think is finished. A bud here, a little twig protruding upward there. Life resides in what seems like the deadest wood. And so it is for the people of God. Like the tree that loved a boy in Shel Silverstein's wonderful little book, "The Giving Tree," we may get old, and tired, and lose our branches, and wind up good for very little at all. But we are loved, and we love, and new life miraculously, graciously emerges where and when we least expect it. And so we praise. And so we have joy.







ommunion

“Why is this night special above all other nights?” So asks the son in the family’s ritual on the evening of Passover. The answer, of course, is that Passover celebrates God’s miraculous deliverance of the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt. In celebration, the finest male lamb was slaughtered and eaten, along with unleavened bread and other symbolic foods.

It was Thursday, just after sundown. The moon was full – a “harvest” moon. Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey to shouts of “Hosanna!” – and he had panicked the authorities by bodily throwing the moneychangers out of the temple precincts. Jesus sensed his time was short. And so with great irony he sat down to the Passover with his disciples, his friends, that night special above all other nights, a night of festive celebration, yet a night fraught with agony for Jesus, his untimely end looming so near.





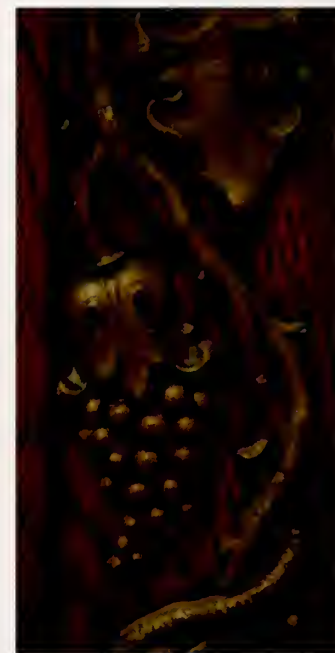
“He took the bread, and blessed it” (Mark 14:22). Jesus certainly “blessed it” by using the traditional Jewish prayer over the loaf for Passover: “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.” In the Old Testament,

Passover is interlaced with the feast of Unleavened Bread. In fact, at the Passover meal, bread prepared without yeast (*mazzoth*) is eaten, as a reminder of how the Hebrews fled Egypt in such haste the women had no time for their leaven. But Unleavened Bread was also a festival of thanksgiving for farmers. Millennia before the advent of sprinklers, fertilizers, pesticides and government subsidies, farmers planted and then knelt daily on dry, rocky soil, pleading with the heavens to yield some rain. When – or if – the rains came, and the wheat or barley grew, the people knew their survival hinged on forces beyond their control. And so they were grateful.

The Lord’s Supper has traditionally been called the “Eucharist” – a word that means thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is not congratulating ourselves for having so much. Rather, giving thanks means having an attitude of dependence upon God for even the simplest joys: a piece of bread, a roof, the rain, another breath. Gratitude is virtually unnatural in our culture, where we work, earn, “deserve” everything. The bread at Holy Communion reminds us that every good and perfect gift comes from God

(James 1:17). We are not our own. The question for us is neither “What is mine?” nor “What do I have coming to me?” but rather this word from one of the Psalms Jesus and the disciples would have sung that night: “What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me?” (Psalm 116:12). Other songs of thanksgiving were intoned that night: “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good... It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in man... The Lord is my strength and my song... This is the day the Lord has made... He raises up the needy... I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving” (from Psalms 113, 114, 116, 118).

Wheat and barley were precious in Israel. When the crop finally was ready, when the first sickle struck the first ripened stalk, that grain was not immediately ground to bake bread, however hungry a family might have been for even a few crumbs. Rather, that first fruit of the earth was offered back to God as a sacrifice. Something precious. Mother Teresa once said, “Giving is not just what you can live without, but what you can’t live without, or don’t want to live without, something you really like. . Then



your gift becomes a sacrifice, which will have value before God. Giving until it hurts is what I call love in action.”

To answer “What shall I render for all his bounty?” the disciples would have continued and sung these lyrics: “I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord” (Psalm 116:13). After they ate the bread, Jesus “took the cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them.” Again, he would have used the traditional Jewish prayer over the Passover wine: “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth fruit from the vine.” If we contemplate the bread and the wine, we may ask why Jesus chose these basic elements and with startling courage said “This is my body, and this is my blood.” Simple, the staff of life, basic staples, bread and wine. At some level we may imagine that bread, as it is broken in two, is a matchless symbol of a body, just as Jesus said “The bread I give for the life of the world is my body” (John 6:51). Surely no more potent symbol for blood could have been found than wine. Frederick Buechner suggested that “Wine is booze, which means it is dangerous and drunk-making. It makes the timid brave and the reserved amorous. It loosens



the tongue and breaks the ice... It kills germs. As symbols go, it is a rather splendid one.”

But there is more. At the Lord's Supper, this “Eucharist,” people who are separated are drawn around a single table. We become one family. In church, people who might normally never see each other become one body because of our fellowship with the risen Christ through this sacrament. Ponder the grapes. In a vineyard, there are thousands of grapes, each with a slightly different shape, its own peculiar color and shading. But as the wine is made, each grape ceases to be an individual. Each is poured out to become a part of the wine, no longer isolated, but flowing together as one. Without Christ we are isolated, even lonely individuals, on our own in the world. But by the miracle of the grace of God, we become one, part of something bigger than ourselves. What a privilege! What gratitude we may have in our hearts.

This is why the endless and cruel theological debates about the Lord's Supper are so tragic. Theologians and denominations have turned a joyful celebration into a bone of contention. We call it “communion,” not merely because we commune with God, but because we are drawn into communion with each other. The Lord's Supper is all about fellowship. Jürgen Moltmann said that Holy Communion takes place “on the basis of an invitation which is as open as the outstretched arms of Christ on the cross.”

John Wesley believed that Communion could actually convert a person! His brother, Charles, wrote beautiful hymns about this meal.



*Come, sinners, to the Gospel feast;
 Let every soul be Jesus' guest.
 Ye need not one be left behind,
 For God hath bid all humankind.*

*Come, Holy Ghost, Thine influence shed,
 And realize the sign;
 Thy life infuse into the bread,
 Thy power into the wine.*

Dr. Steve Shoemaker published a great sermon that drew beautifully on Anne Tyler's novel, *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*. Ezra Tull decided to reopen Mrs. Scarlatti's restaurant in Baltimore and cook what people were homesick for: hot tacos for a Mexican neighbor, vinegary barbecue for a guy from North Carolina. One woman had told Shoemaker she was homesick for her grandmother's mashed potatoes, now that her grandmother had died. It's not the potatoes, so much as the joy of being together, the love and comfort – home. He goes on to explore the way the Communion table might function as a “homesick restaurant.” We are homesick for some word from God, for fellowship, for hope, for Christ himself. At the end of the sermon, Shoemaker asks us to imagine Christ wearing an apron, waiting on your table. “What would you like?” he asks. We stammer and ask for a little time. We're not always sure what we want, what we're homesick for. He is patient. ‘Escargot?’ we ask, ‘What is escargot?’ ‘I don't think that's what you're looking for,’ he answers. ‘Have you tried our roast beef and

mashed potatoes?’ ‘That sounds good,’ we say and smile with sudden recognition. We're nervous about the price and look over to the right-hand column – the place where the prices are – and, to our consternation, see no prices. You know you're in trouble when the prices aren't even printed! He sees our anxiety and says, ‘Don't worry. It's on the house. Welcome home.’”



Baptism

We begin every service of Baptism by saying, “The Church is of God, and will be preserved to the end of time.” For twenty centuries, the Church has baptized people, infants, children, adolescents, adults, in every language, in every place, immersing them in massive pools, sprinkling their heads. With joyful simplicity, we do as Jesus told us to do.



And when we are baptized, we do what Jesus did. Just as he embarked on his ministry, “Jesus came from Nazareth and was baptized by John in the Jordan. When he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased’” (Mark 1:9-11).

Ask any child what water is for, and she will answer, “To drink when I’m thirsty,” and “To bathe in when I’m dirty.” Jesus needed no forgiveness. So why was he baptized? Theologian Karl Barth said Jesus was not being theatrical, but that he was in fact baptized for the forgiveness of sins: Jesus did not let our sins remain our sins but, determined to be our brother, took our sins on himself, and came to the Jordan afflicted by all our waywardness and affliction, just as he took our misery to the cross at the end of his ministry.

On the cross Jesus cried out, “I thirst.” What irony! This is the man who asked the woman for water from Jacob’s well (John 4), but then told her she would continue to be thirsty until she

knew him, for he was and is the “living water.” Baptism’s powerful symbol is water, for it is the grace of God that we are desperately thirsty for. And the only thing that can quench our thirst is something we cannot buy, or earn, or even entirely figure out (Isaiah 55:1-11). God’s great gift to us is free.

This is why we baptize infants. Do they know or remember God? Have they yet done anything to achieve their status as God’s precious children? Of course not. Infants are utterly and wonderfully dependent on the gentle care of parents to feed, hold, dress, and cherish them. And so it always must be with us and God. Water brings life. Water softens the parched ground, and our hard hearts. Without water, living things cannot grow, and without God’s grace we wither and die. Water surges, subsides, cools, is breathed by the creatures of the deep.





God's Spirit descended on Christ like a dove. That same Spirit of God, at the dawn of time, "brooded over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2). After the forty days of rain ceased, Noah sent out a dove, who searched and plucked out a lone sign of life and hope, an olive leaf. That same Spirit of God came down like the rush of a mighty wind, "like tongues of fire" (Acts 2:2-3), and the disciples, so sullen and in despair, were catapulted out into the streets to change the world. C.S. Lewis's good friend, the novelist Charles Williams, wrote a history of the Church appropriately titled *The Descent of the Dove*.



God's Spirit descended on Christ, with a declaration: "You are my beloved child." Since Christ is our brother, since Christ did what he did so we could be set right with God, then we dare to hear in that voice from heaven God's very word to us. Every one of us should hear God say, very personally, "You are my beloved child."

Perhaps this is hard to hear, or seems just unbelievable. That's why Martin Luther repeatedly said, "Remember your baptism, and be thankful!" Remember who you are. Remember *whose* you are. Your worth does not rest on the great things you achieve, or your good looks or clever brilliance. Your worth rests on this descending dove, and this freely given image of God etched indelibly on your self. And so we are thankful. Not prideful, and never saying "I've earned what I've got." The dove descends where it will, with power, gently.

St. Augustine said that a sacrament is a "visible word." The

word made visible in the water of Baptism is that God is “love.” God says “I love you.” Think about the implications of this visible word. God gives us everything – and asks for everything. C.S. Lewis wrote, “You asked for a loving God: you have one. The great spirit you so lightly invoke is present: not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, nor the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the consuming fire himself, the Love that made the worlds, persistent as the artist’s love for his work and despotic as a man’s love for a dog, provident and venerable as a father’s love for a child, jealous, inexorable, exacting as love between the sexes.”

If God’s love is akin to what we hope for in families and among friends, then that love, this descending dove, calls us into a great congregation of God’s people in every place, in every century, in the past, now, in the future. Through Baptism we discover ourselves to be the brothers and sisters of Simon Peter and Mary the mother of Jesus, of Paul, Silas and Lydia, of Francis and Clare of Assisi, of Martin Luther, of the Wesley family, of Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, not to mention our parents, grandparents, sib-



lings, children and friends, and an almost infinite host of others whose names may have been forgotten by us but most certainly not by God.

Hildegard of Bingen wrote, “The Holy Spirit is life-giving life, universal mover and the root of all creation, refiner of all things from their dross, brings forgiveness of guilt and oil for our wounds, is radiance of life, most worthy of worship, wakening and reawakening both earth and heaven.” Will we let the Spirit do its work, give us life, awaken us to love? The yearning is there. We all sense it in the marrow of our souls. As Ignatius of Antioch said, “There is living water in me, water that murmurs and says within me, ‘Come to the Father.’”



Marriage



Why do we dress as we do for weddings? Some believe the custom began so that every person would have the chance to be King or Queen for a day. There is something royal about the pageantry and formality in a wedding. Not that we do

what we do to satisfy Emily Post or Miss Manners. On the contrary, we may reflect on a pair of nuances hidden in the way we present ourselves at the altar for marriage.

Paul wrote (in a passage that is read at quite a number of weddings), "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:12-17).

Yes, we put on clothes, but they symbolize our deeper





intent to put on kindness, patience, forgiveness, thanksgiving, and harmony – those elusive, not easy-to-find clothes without which we truly are exposed and embarrassed.

And there is more. As the culmination of a courtship, marriage (or the way we solemnize marriage) is the climax of an elaborate interpersonal ritual that is a smidgen dishonest. Walter Wangerin wrote that “love lies a little. Love edits the facts, allowing me an innocent misperception of my fiancée, while encouraging in her a favorable misperception of myself. If love isn’t blind, it does squint a bit. Love idealizes us both.” He humorously admits how he was a dazzling wonder while courting the woman who became his wife, acknowledging that “I put my best foot forward. Was I deceiving her? Of course not. I was showing her what I truly believed myself to be in the generous light of her love – and what I knew I could become, if only for the prize of her hand in marriage.”

What might we become? Who are we – in the glowing light of love? The love we celebrate at a wedding is frequently devalued and poisoned in our culture – but the ideal is solid, and never to be forgotten. To love is “to see the other person as God intended that person to be” (Dostoevsky). And we promise at the altar to love, not while all goes smoothly, or as long as I am self-fulfilled, but “for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, until we are parted by death.”

So we fashion homes that have an atmosphere of mercy. We make and keep our promises, and we allow space between us for others. Notice how in the wedding the bride and groom do not clutch each other in a tight hug. Instead, their hands join, and



there is a space. Other people want in that space. Parents, siblings, friends. Children may be a blessing in the future. And every couple needs to make room for God, and for the privilege to go out into the world together to serve, to make a difference.

We take expensive photos at our weddings, as we should, so that we never forget the day we were kings and queens. Look closely at the faces, the smiles, the flowers, the attire. There is an excellence, a beauty, a hopefulness, a tenderness – not to be frittered away in the busy round of the rest of life. It is a pledge to love “til death do us part.”

Funeral

Parting is rarely any kind of “sweet sorrow.” Yes, we believe in eternal life, in the resurrection – but losing someone we love is knee-buckling, dizzying, numbing. Where else do we turn, but to the Church? We bring the one we have loved and cannot imagine living without into God’s house, where the beloved once was baptized, where the beloved was married, where the beloved saw others baptized and married, where prayers were offered, where God was known. And we have a funeral.

How interesting that in the early days of Christianity, believers gathered for prayer and worship – where? In cemeteries. The catacombs in Rome (and other places) were burial grounds for Christians, and the surviving faithful painted the walls with symbols of their hope: Jonah being rescued from the belly of the fish, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego surviving the fiery furnace,

Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene. They saw in the Bible's story of creation, the sending of Jesus, and his gruesome suffering and glorious resurrection the very plot of their own lives, their hope in the face of despair. And so the Christians lit candles and sang hymns in the cemeteries, believing they were right at the entrance into heaven itself, that some invisible bridge connected them to the saints and to Jesus himself who dwelled securely in heaven with God, and that this would be their own ultimate destination.

At the funeral, we bravely sing, although making music is difficult. We utter words to which we cling, especially the beloved twenty-third Psalm:

*The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul:
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil:
for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil;
my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*



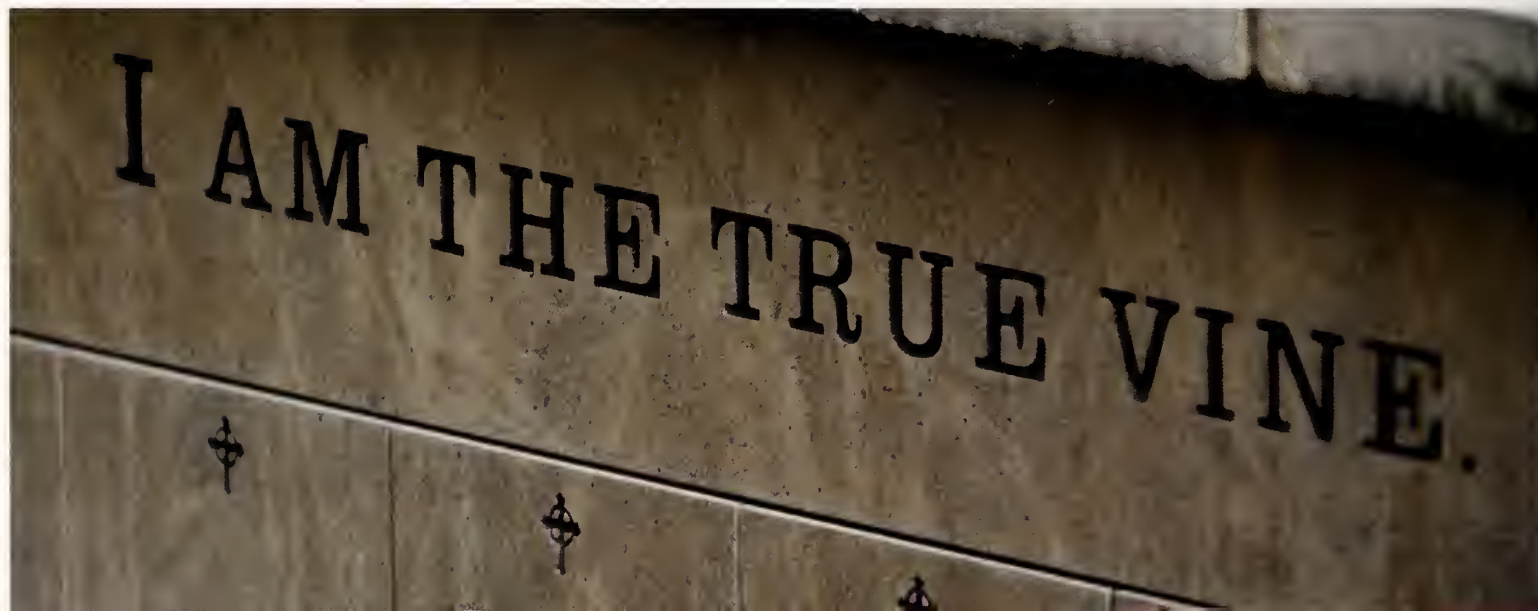
Is it that we are unfamiliar with the rest of the Psalms? or is it that these treasured, precious words powerfully usher us through the darkest valley and dig inside our souls to give us hope?

When the coffin is taken out of the sanctuary, the room feels sad. There is a hollowness in the place. And yet, noting the emptiness, we may remember what the angel said to the bewildered, fearful disciples who scrambled into Jesus' tomb on that first Easter morning: "He is not here. He is risen!"

Sometimes when we reach out to comfort the bereaved, we may say "God can help you feel better." But sometimes they do not want to feel better. Pain is an index into the depth of the love, and so to ameliorate the pain might risk a diminishing of the love, or to move on and feel better might cloud the memory. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, sitting alone on Christmas Eve of 1943 in an empty place – a concentration camp cell, his punishment for plotting against Hitler – wrote a letter to his family, reflecting on

people he had loved and lost, and no doubt of his own fate and awful separation from his beloved family, including these eloquent words: "Nothing can make up for the absence of someone whom we love, and it would be wrong to try to find a substitute; we must simply hold out and see it through. That sounds very hard at first, but at the same time it is a great consolation, for the gap, as long as it remains unfilled, preserves the bonds between us. It is nonsense to say God fills the gap; he doesn't fill it, but on the contrary, he keeps it empty and so helps us to keep alive our former communion with each other, even at the cost of pain... The dearer and richer our memories, the more difficult the separation. But gratitude changes the pangs of memory into tranquil joy. The beauties of the past are borne, not as a thorn in the flesh, but as a precious gift in themselves."

And so every time we step into a sanctuary where the funeral of one we have loved took place, we remember. We leave





the space open – and discover, to our surprise, some joy. For we recall that our life is not lived in the immediate, direct, palpable, tangible presence of God. “He is not here; he is risen.” We love the “risen,” and forget that “he is not here.” Imagine how devastated, how emotionally jolted, the disciples must have been, giggling with glee that Jesus was back, that he was alive once more, when he informed them that it was only for a very brief time, and that he would be going soon, returning to his Father in heaven, leaving them here, alone again. Like parents who dote on their children, but love them too much to cling to them forever, Jesus walked away, and the strangest of all God’s acts was precisely that departure, trusting the not so very trustworthy disciples to stand on their own two feet, to carry out a commission to transform the world. On the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven. We might prefer he had stayed, so we could hold hands, so he could keep his arms around us every moment, so he could dash off a miracle or two when required. But how like God the Father is this Jesus: just as he left the tomb empty, he leaves this earth and our lives empty, not full, with a space that lingers, a space that can hurt, a space that can remember, a space in which we can get to work. For our life is forever defined by an empty place, an open space, and is lived best when we keep it empty and open – which is the impossible possibility.

Yet we never for a moment flinch and give up on that day when we and all of God’s saints will be restored into perfect fellowship with him and with each other. And so, in the meantime, we sing. We pray, we wait, we listen. We trust, making the time that we know rests safely in God’s tender, loving hands.



LUCIE DULIN and her family usually sat along the side aisle. Their particular pew, chosen for its extra leg room, allowed her 6' 9 1/2" son to stretch his legs. From her vantage point, she appreciated the beauty of the Myers Park sanctuary. A portrait painter, Lucie had an eye for form and color, and she admired Jose Fumero's expertly woven Dossal tapestry, Leo Pitassi's richly colored art glass, and the symbolic carvings that decorated the chancel. Studying these elements Sunday after Sunday, she eventually saw a need that she could fill.

Needlework – which can be traced back to the Garden of Eden “and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons” Genesis 3:7 – ranges in scope from the merely utilitarian to high art. During the Middle Ages, embroidery, at the artistic end of the spectrum, joined crafts such as sculpture, music, and masonry in importance to create a worthy setting for worship.

The medieval crafts – also called ‘mysteres’ – were carefully guarded, thus protecting both the economic interests and the quality standards of the various guilds. Mastering one's craft was a cause for great celebration. When the young stone mason proved his competence, his lodge bestowed upon him his own mason's mark. Such marks were important status symbols whose use depended ultimately on the authority of the lodges. It was also customary for his master to provide dinner for the apprentice and “ten of his fellows.” As for needlework, it was often the convents and royal households who developed and safeguarded the mystere. Ordinary linen, when “painted” with intricate combinations of metallic, woolen, and silken threads was transformed into rich and imaginative artwork.

In 1974, Lucie Dulin temporarily traded her canvases for graph paper and set about designing needlepoint patterns to enhance the chancel furnishings. She looked to the reredos for inspiration and recreated the Jerusalem cross pattern woven in the Dossal, providing a common background for the kneeling rail cushions. She drew from the palette of the windows and the imagery of the carvings to design thirty-two symbols for the twelve cushions. Forty-five women and one man followed Lucie's designs, stitching steadily for twelve months. Their work was completed in time for the 50th Anniversary of the church in October, 1975. Later, hangings were created for the seasons of Advent and Lent with each set incorporating an additional ten symbols. Since designing the Myers Park needlepoint furnishings, Lucie went on to design needlepoint patterns for thirty other churches in the Carolinas and Georgia.



The rooster is an avian symbol for vigilance and watchfulness. Its loud crowing routed burglars, announced the dawn and called the faithful to work and prayer. Although now most associate it with Peter's denial, in early Christian art the rooster was the announcer of the new day and as such was a sign of the Resurrection.



Hail O favored one, the Lord is with you!"
but she was greatly troubled at the saying, and
considered in her mind what sort of
greeting this might be. And
the angel said to her, "Do
not be afraid, Mary, for you
have found favor with
God."

(Luke: 28-30)



N THE BIBLE, angels interrupt people on their journeys, startle people with unheralded news, pull back the curtain in the dark and step boldly into dreams. However unexpected, or unsolicited, their first pronouncement is always a command – or really an invitation to the light: “Fear not!” Fear is the antithesis of faith. Where there is fear, evil lurks; but perfect love casts out all fear.

The angelic message was well understood by Elie Wiesel when he said, “If an angel ever says, ‘Be not afraid,’ you’d better watch out: a big assignment is on the way.” Faith is when we are open to big assignments. The life of faith is not being three percent nicer or seven percent more optimistic. Faith is a total openness to God, latching on to (or being swept up in) God’s remarkable adventure through the universe and time.

Because of the good news of the angels, and the hope their songs declare, we can resonate to these powerful words written by a Chicago architect, Daniel Burnham, at the turn of the twentieth century: “Make no small plans. They have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing,



asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty. Think big.”

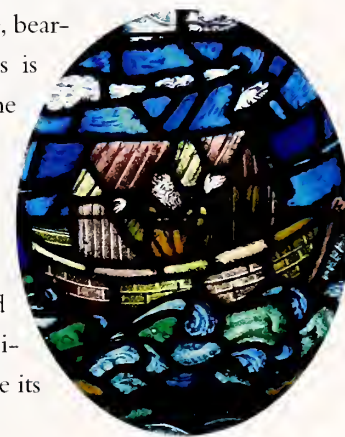
The apostle Paul thought big – or the vision that knocked him flat on his face on the road to Damascus enlarged his mind. Faith jerked Paul in an entirely different direction from where he had been heading. Not that he was slimy or unethical: he was a deeply pious, prayerful, morally zealous person. The new direction was all about one thing, one person really: Jesus. Faith is coming to know Jesus, trusting, putting your self in his hands, staking your future entirely on him.

Paul could not sit still. Restless, energetically intrepid, Paul walked literally thousands of miles across Palestine, modern day Turkey, Greece and into Italy. He embarked on treacherous sea journeys, determined, even at the risk of shipwreck and death, to find one more person in one more city who perhaps had not heard of Jesus. Being at sea, especially in ancient times, must have induced ambivalence in passengers. The sea was a peril not to be trifled with. Ships were ramshackle by our standards, uneven boards barely hanging together, creaking – at once protecting sailors from the waves, and at the same time endangering them.



We wonder if Jewish sailors, or passengers like Paul, thought of that old story they learned as toddlers, and even memorized as children: Noah and the ark. Scavenger hunters have scoured the mountains of eastern Turkey hoping to find petrified wood from this legendary ship, this floating zoo. But the story is one of renewed life in the face of judgment, of renewed hope in the face of catastrophe. Even if everyone else in the world turns from God toward decadence, God always has somebody, some oddball, who flings caution to the wind and sticks with God, despite the mockery of neighbors. Noah built, and life was spared. The ark, floating safely through dangerous seas, has been the darling of artists for centuries trying to imagine what the Church is all about. We are in the ship, teeming with life, steered only by the wind of God’s Spirit, tossed about, but secure, bearing life into the future. This is faith, this is hope, and this is the embodiment of God’s love.

If the ark could symbolize the Church, then it is not a far reach to think of the anchor as its mooring, its solid grounding. The anchor stabilizes, and helps the ship to cease its





rocking, to shelter it from being dragged off course. Christopher Lasch helped us understand hope: “Hope doesn’t demand progress; it demands justice, a conviction that wrongs will be made right, that the underlying order of things is not flouted with impunity. Hope appears absurd to those who lack it. We can see why hope serves us better than optimism. Not that it prevents us from expecting the worst; the worst is what the hopeful are prepared for. A blind faith that things will somehow work out for the best furnishes a poor substitute for the disposition to see things through even when they don’t.”

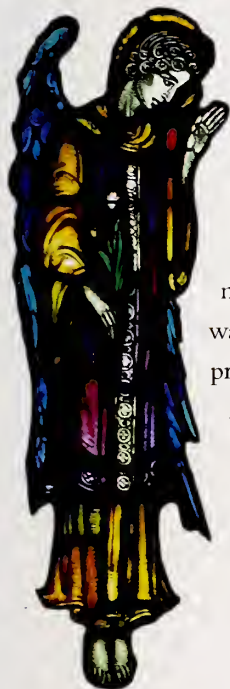
How many of the Bible’s stories embody this hope that sees things through? Abraham hopes against hope, and becomes father of a mighty nation. Joseph sees God’s hidden plan and forgives his vicious brothers. Moses keeps Israel on course through the wilderness. The prophets overheard the voice of God’s eternal plan and shouted it from the rooftops.

The most lovely gathering of stories of hope is found in Daniel. The Babylonians have razed Jerusalem to the ground, and the survivors are compelled to live under something like house arrest in a foreign land, where they are constantly tempted and seduced by an alien culture. But some steadfast remain faithful to God. Shadrach,

Meshach and Abednego quite simply refuse to bow down and worship the massive golden statue erected to the emperor. Threatened with the furnace’s flames, they declare – not that they are sure God will protect them from harm – but that even if they must die, they will not bow down to any false God. Tossed into the fiery furnace, they miraculously walk safely through the flames, and come out not even smelling of smoke. Daniel, their friend and colleague in faith, hope and love, is similarly threatened, but refuses to relinquish his faith for even a moment. Thrown to the lions, Daniel – with no circus tricks, but merely a prayer or two – befriends the fierce carnivores.



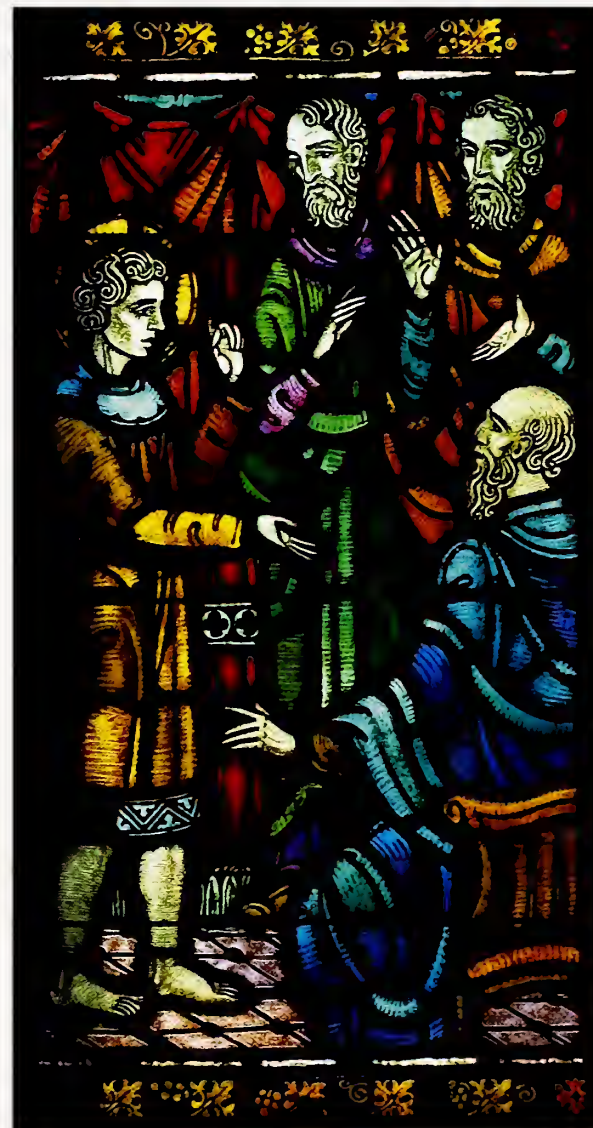
And so, as people of faith and hope, we pray. Prayer is not getting my life under control. Prayer is yielding control to God. Prayer does not insulate me against difficulty. But prayer does establish a relationship to God that is worth living for, and worth dying for. An angel – or was it the Lord himself? – walked with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego through the fiery torment. An angel ministered to Daniel in the lion’s den. An angel slipped into Joseph’s bed while he slept one night and revealed God’s marvel that was coming to be in the virgin Mary. So Joseph was merciful. Joseph stuck with her. He was the target of sarcasm, ugly humor and shameful gossip. But he was unshakable in his resolve to heed the angel, and to love Mary.



Joseph tends to come off as a bit sheepish in those Christmas pageants we see. No real acting ability required: he just stands there, gazing, a bit awkwardly, holding the donkey's reins. But let us think about Joseph. He was there. His job was to be near the Christ-child. And as Jesus grew up, Joseph was there, teaching Jesus the Scriptures, teaching him to pray, apprenticing him in the craft of woodworking. He was near Jesus – and that is what the life of faith is all about, isn't it? Being near Jesus. We sing our most heartfelt prayer at Christmas:

*Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care.
And fit us for heaven to live with thee there.*

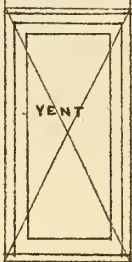
How blessed was Joseph, just to be near Jesus. And while we do not know what actually became of Joseph, it is safe to assume that he died before Jesus was grown and dramatically dazzling the people of Galilee with his miracles and teaching. Jesus no doubt stood by his bedside as Joseph first was sick, then grew more incapacitated. Jesus knelt and prayed. With Mary, he held his father's hand. He saw him breathe his last. He saw to his proper burial. He shed tears. He held his mother. And this may be of tender comfort to all of us who wait by a bedside, who pray, who weep, who lose those we love.



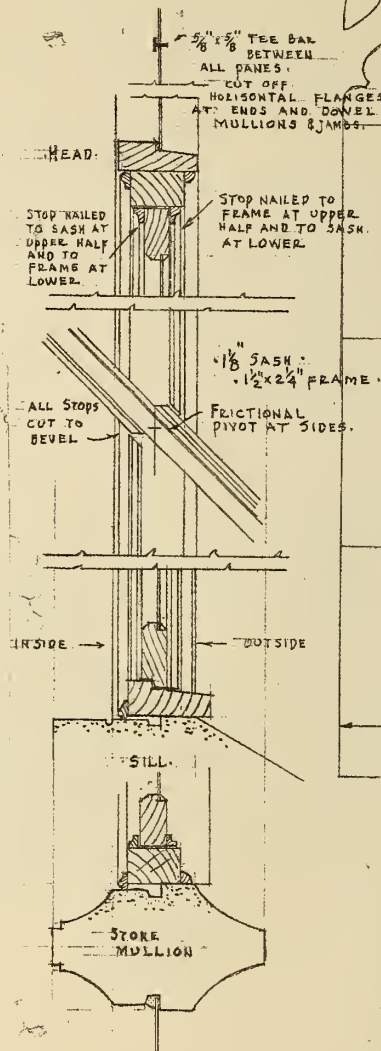
P

ictures and ornaments in churches are the lessons and scriptures of the laity...for what writing supplies to him who can read, that does a picture supply to him who is unlearned and can only look.

— THIRTEENTH-CENTURY BISHOP



PART OF LARGE WINDOW IN FRONT.
SCALE: 3/4"=1'-0"



VENTILATOR DETAIL
SCALE: 3/4"=1'-0"



CLEAR STORY WINDOWS
ON SIDES.
SCALE: 3/4"=1'-0"

TEMPORARY GLASS AND
VENTILATOR.
MYERS PARK M.E. CHURCH WINDOWS.
LOUIS H. ASBURY, ARCHITECT.

ROUGHLY a one thousand year period of history is labeled simply: Medieval. Within those ten centuries, changes and developments occurred that subdivide the broader term.

It was the advent of the pointed Gothic arch which led the charge for the vigorous outpouring of architectural and artistic endeavors of the High Middle Ages, the period from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries. This single feature freed the architect from using only the Romanesque, or barrel, vault and enabled him to create soaring spaces. The upwardly reaching grandeur of these arched interiors inspired both awe and humility. The expanded heights also inspired increasingly elaborate fenestration.

Lancet windows, dating from the thirteenth century, were sharply pointed openings. Tall and thin, they kept the amount of expensive glass to a minimum. Glass was set into these windows in small diamond-shaped panes called quarries. Windows from the Romanesque period strongly resemble the carpets which they probably replaced as window coverings. The "traceries window," the east window behind the high altar, was surely one of the chief glories of the Gothic era. The placement of this window was dictated by the steep pitch of the roofline. But, when the pitch flattened, owing to the development of the pointed arch, the clerestory developed. The taller the clerestories, the larger the windows. More light poured into the nave and greater opportunities existed for masons and glaziers to demonstrate their artistic skills. As the walls of the church rose in height to meet the broader roof, the possibilities seemed endless.

The turn of the fourteenth century saw the beginning of the Decorated Style. Technical advances enabled the development of intricate patterns, among them the three-lobed trefoils and four-lobed quatrefoil designs. Window tracery included elaborately moulded and cusped forms and embellishment was generously employed to fill the spaces between. Small patterns, consisting of foliated ornament, or of circles, lozenges, zig-zags, or other geometric designs were repeated in complex configurations.

Early stained glass artisans knew nothing about the Middle East and nothing of life there in Biblical times. They drew inspiration from the world about them, clothing their figures in the costume of the day and setting them in houses and gardens very similar to their own. Their palette was rich and varied, their style less rigid than that of the Byzantine era; they used more youthful figures with garments draping fluidly over well-modeled forms.

It was from the vivid images rendered in glass, rather than the worship service (conducted in Latin and therefore, incomprehensible to most) that the villager's knowledge of the Faith was gleaned. The Church had exacting guidelines, laid out as early as the eighth century, that prescribed acceptable window imagery. It was the popular legends of the saints, however, that usually determined what was depicted in the windows.



Centuries later, David Clark, chairman of Myers Park Methodist's Window Selection Committee began searching for a company that could produce windows similar to those at Belmont Abbey. Mail received during the summer of 1929 was rife with correspondence from art glass companies across the country vying for the privilege. Tightly-worded telegrams and long-winded letters were sent to architect Louis Asbury on the eve of the Great Depression. Some companies claimed that they could do the job "dirt cheap," some companies made no bones that they desperately needed the work; others boasted of their previous accomplishments.

The Glass Selection Committee met on September 4, 1929. "Mr Clark was not so well impressed with this work" reads a note that summed up the meeting. The committee decided that none of the companies clamoring for the project would do. The man who was ultimately awarded the job, Leo Pitassi, sent no fancy letterhead; he

wasted no flowery words. Instead, he sent hastily written scrawls – "Where are templates for clerestory windows?" and impatient reminders:

Nov. 16, 1929: *require templates and estimate amount of glass*

Dec. 12, 1929: *Pittsburgh Plate and Glass glass allowance*
\$283.57

Dec. 18, 1929: *I could have one clerestory and one aisle window*
ready by Feb 14. Where are tracery patterns?

His correspondence dated Dec 28, 1929 said basically, *Hurry up.*

Templates were sent (finally) to Mr. A. L. Pitassi, 5345 Penn Ave, Pittsburgh, PA on Feb. 15, 1930. Fifteen years later, in 1945, the final stained glass window depicting the Seven Virtues, was installed.



AURORA ART GLASS CO.

112 Boulevard of the Allies
Pittsburgh



Telephone Court 5880
~ Penna. ~

June 17th
1924

Mr. Louis H. Asbury
1514 East 4th Street
Charlotte, N. C.

Re: Myers Park M. E. C.

Dear Sir:

Mr. H. C. Sherrill has suggested
communicate with you regarding
glass windows.

Having a complete staff of
craftsmen specializing in
we would be very happy to
nity of assisting you.

If you will be good enough
information of your requirements
ably a set of the blue and
pare special sketches of
particular design or
carried out.

Trusting to hear from you

ESTABLISHED 1899
MANUFACTURERS OF
LEADED STAINED GLASS

Empire Glass & Decoration Co.

DESIGNERS OF
MEMORIAL WINDOWS

148-150 EDGEWOOD AVE.

ATLANTA, GA. Sept. 18, 1929.

File #327.

Mr. Louis H. Asbury,
1514 East 4th Street,
Charlotte, N. C.

Dear Mr. Asbury:

In accordance with your
day, I called to see Mr. Clark
dows in the Myers Park Methodist
gestion, I am today shipping a
Whitten, and I am especially anxious
window.

Mr. Clark requested that
Abbey Church, as he said they wanted
line and for this reason, we are
them for inspection.

You will note that this window
Imported Antique Glass, with the exception
drapery, and the artist found that the
color effects by using this glass in

After the committee has inspected
they still desire us to give them a price
work, we will be glad to do so upon the
course you realize that this is very ex-
you can readily appreciate this type of

Thanking you for past favors, we are

Yours very truly,
EMPIRE GLASS & DECORATION CO.
E. B. Buchanan
Manager.

ECB/L

SAB:LC

ESTABLISHED 1896

JACOBY ART GLASS CO.

DESIGNERS AND MAKERS OF
CHURCH AND MEMORIAL WINDOWS

ST VINCENT AVE AT OHIO
ST. LOUIS, MO.

August 13, 1929

F. A. BISHOP, PROPRIETOR

BEVELED PLATE GLASS
COPPER METALLIC BASH

David Clark,
the windows
will be great

High Point Glass & Decorative Co.

Church and Memorial Windows

ORNAMENTAL GLASS

Designers and Workers in
Decorative Glass

High Point, N. C.
September 11/29

Mr. Louis H. Asbury,
Charlotte, N.C.

Dear Mr. Asbury;

RE. MYERS PARK METHODIST CHURCH.
CHARLOTTE, N.C.

We are inclosing a copy of our letter to Mr. David Clark,
Chairman Building Committee of the above named.

Yours very truly,

HIGH POINT GLASS & DECORATIVE CO.

hbk.h.

LANDSCAPE WINDOWS A
SPECIALTY
WIND SHIELDS FOR AUTOS
DESIGNS AND ESTIMATES
FURNISHED
LET US QUOTE YOU
PRICES
LONG DISTANCE PHONE
LOCAL 2125-2626

P. O. PUBLISHER, Press
C. B. JACOBY, Secy. & Treas.
S. A. OPLINGER, V. Pres.





WORSHIP IS GRATITUDE. Life can be gratitude. But gratitude is elusive for us, as we are focused on what I have achieved, what I possess, what is mine, what I deserve. Worship can school us in gratitude, so thankfulness can become as vital, normal, and liberating as breathing.

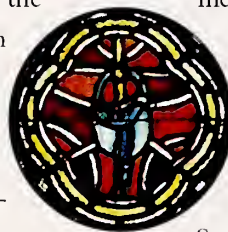
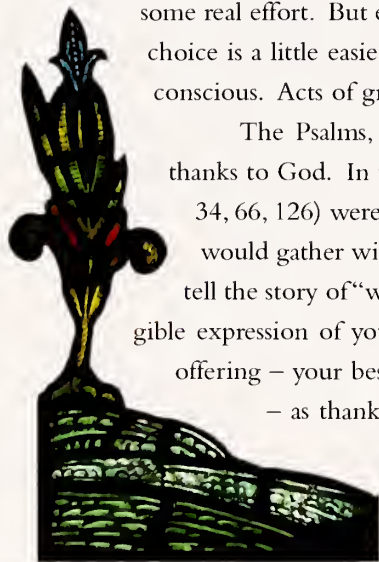
The ancient Israelites enjoyed a huge advantage over us in terms of feeling grateful. Lacking technology and financial security, they knew they were utterly dependent upon God for their bread (if they had any bread), for shelter (if they had any shelter), for taking that next breath, for the sunshine and rain. We modern people are so smart, so self-sufficient – especially in America, where we prize “independence” above all else.

We think of gratitude as a feeling that you either have spontaneously, or you just don’t – and generally we don’t. We nurture grievances and file complaints. Advertisers incessantly lull us into a sense of dissatisfaction, so we will buy their products. Even the season of Thanksgiving becomes one more day of vacation, when the malls have sales and we gorge ourselves with a bit too much turkey and dressing.

Perhaps our hardest lesson in prayer is to develop this counter-intuitive sense of dependence. I am not the master of my fate. It’s not all up to me. I don’t “earn” what is genuinely good in life. It is all gift, all grace.

Henri Nouwen understood how gratitude takes practice: “The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift to be celebrated with joy. Gratitude as a discipline involves a conscious choice. I can choose to be grateful even when my emotions and feelings are still steeped in hurt. It is amazing how many occasions present themselves in which I can choose gratitude instead of a complaint. I can choose to be grateful, even if my heart is bitter. I can choose to speak about goodness and beauty, even when my inner eye looks for something to call ugly. I can choose to listen to the voices that forgive and to look at the faces that smile, even while I still hear words of resentment and grimaces of hate... The choice for gratitude rarely comes without some real effort. But each time I make it, the next choice is a little easier, a little freer, a little less self-conscious. Acts of gratitude make one grateful.”

The Psalms, once again, are a mighty chorus of thanks to God. In fact, many of the Psalms (such as 30, 34, 66, 126) were little worship services in which you would gather with family, neighbors, and friends, and tell the story of “what God has done for me.” As a tangible expression of your gratitude, you would offer up an offering – your best sheep, the first wheat that ripened – as thanks to God. To grow in gratitude, we will probably need to be sure our “thanks” are tangible, involving our stuff, offered to God, shared



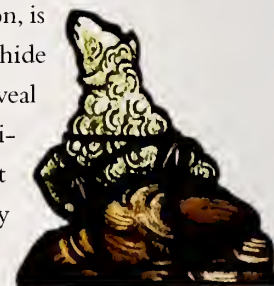
with the poor.

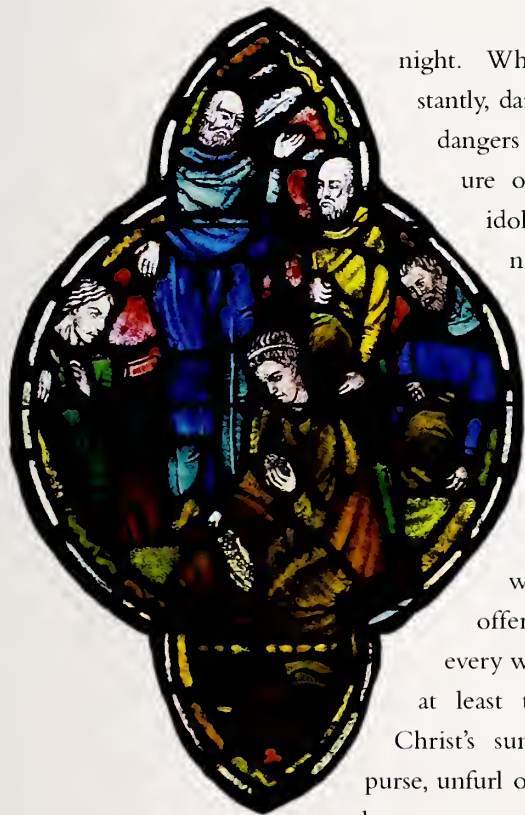
When John Wesley began meeting with other young men at Oxford, they grappled with what it meant to take Christianity seriously. Jesus had spoken of the final judgment like this: “Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me’” (Matthew 25:34).

Wesley’s friends could not ignore the existence of prisoners, for they had to walk every day past the North Gate of the Oxford city walls, where the Bocardo city jail was built directly in the wall itself. Prisoners lowered baskets from their windows pleading with passers-by for food or money.

So Wesley and company not only filled the baskets, but also began to visit the prisoners. They read Scripture, prayed, sang hymns, witnessed conversions – and scandalized Oxford!

But it is at the heart of Christianity to give to those in need, to care for the poor. A fascinating image of the life of faith, and our responsibility to be in mission, is the purse. What is a purse? Does it hold money, hide money, protect money? Or does it open up to reveal money, to share money? Methodists love to reminisce about Wesley’s Aldersgate experience, that magical night on which his heart was “strangely warmed.” But Wesley never talked about that





night. What he did speak of constantly, daily, almost hourly, was the dangers of wealth, “laying up treasure on earth,” which leads to idolatry, greed, self-centeredness, and a loss of humility. Wesley insisted that it is “far better to *carry* relief to the poor, rather than to *send* it.” The Church sends and carries relief to the poor. Our worship would be incomplete without the collection, the offering. We demonstrate every week in worship that we are at least trying to be faithful to Christ’s summons as we open the purse, unfurl our hearts, and give generously.

One of Jesus’ most memorable stories is the Parable of the Sower. And no better image could ever suggest itself to us to help us think toward the life we offer up toward God.

Jesus told a story about a sower (Matthew 13:1-9). Some of his seed fell on the road, some among thorns, some in shallow soil – and did not flourish. But some seed fell into fertile soil, and produced a hundredfold.





In a way this story is a challenge to us, to be fertile, to let God's word take root in our souls. But moreso, it is a story about God. Jesus is saying that God is like that sower – flinging seed any and everywhere. When God gives away his grace, his love, he is not stingy, but incredibly generous, downright wasteful. God isn't just looking for people who are good bets to do well. God strews his love all over, in unlikely places, aggressive, hopeful, profligate.

A mystery is tucked away in a verse in the 15th chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Unless a seed falls into the ground and dies, it cannot come to life; so it is with the resurrection. If you think about it, seeds grow in the dark. John Milton described life in our fallen world as "darkness visible." Being a seed in God's hand isn't all sweetness. We get sick, we suffer loss, we struggle with dysfunction – we are mortal. Jesus' own death – for our salvation! – is like a seed, dying, falling into the ground, but hidden in that seed is the life of the resurrection. Jesus, the embodiment of God's love, died so we would never suffer or die alone. As his arms are spread on that cross, God's arms are casting seeds of hope into our darkness. God's arms enfold us in love.

For Easter is coming. When we think about our lives, we bet everything on Easter, on the too-good-not-to-be-true fact that the grave could not contain Jesus, that he lives, so that we might live, together, forever, with God, the seed having borne its ultimate fruit.

That life together we now call the Church. We think about Church using various metaphors, such as the image that we are the "body" of Christ. But another vivid image for what we're about is

this sower, flinging seed any and everywhere. In the same way that God, in creating the world, would try anything, so we may try anything, not be skimpy, but profligate, eager to get the Gospel out to every place, to every person.

Not all of it is successful. Like Jesus' sower: some seed takes root, some doesn't. But if a lot of seed is flung around, surprises happen. We may make mistakes, and all is not lost because all belongs to God. Some mistakes are actually used by God for good. Even our human worst can be transformed into grace. In the remarkable little story in Genesis 37-45, Joseph's insanely jealous brothers sell him into slavery and convince their father that his favored son has been mauled by a wild animal.



But what an ending this story has! God does not give them some kind of second chance, so they can rectify their errors or do better. On the contrary: God actually uses their foolishness, their sin, for God's good purposes (Genesis 45:1-8). If we serve such a God, then we can with reckless abandon fling what we have all over the place, knowing God is there through our resourceful and clever efforts, and also through our dimwitted, misguided efforts.

Lots of times, the success of something we do is not immediately obvious, or may be delayed for years. I know in

my own life, I had a Sunday School teacher in the 5th grade, a coach in the 10th grade, a history professor as a freshman, a youth minister during college, even grandparents who died before I was grown up – all people who sowed seeds in me, who weeded and fertilized and watered my soul, and most of them never saw much result from what they did for me. But they changed me. We open our hands and take a meal to someone, teach a Sunday School class, drive a van, speak a word of hope, sit on a committee, place our offering in the plate, or smile – all just seeds, flung about. Seeds take time. We sow them, and trust God that as the rain comes down from heaven, and does not return without watering the earth, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, “so shall my word be; it shall not return to me empty, but it will accomplish what I purpose” (Isaiah 55:10-11).





F great riches there
is no real use... — FRANCIS BACON

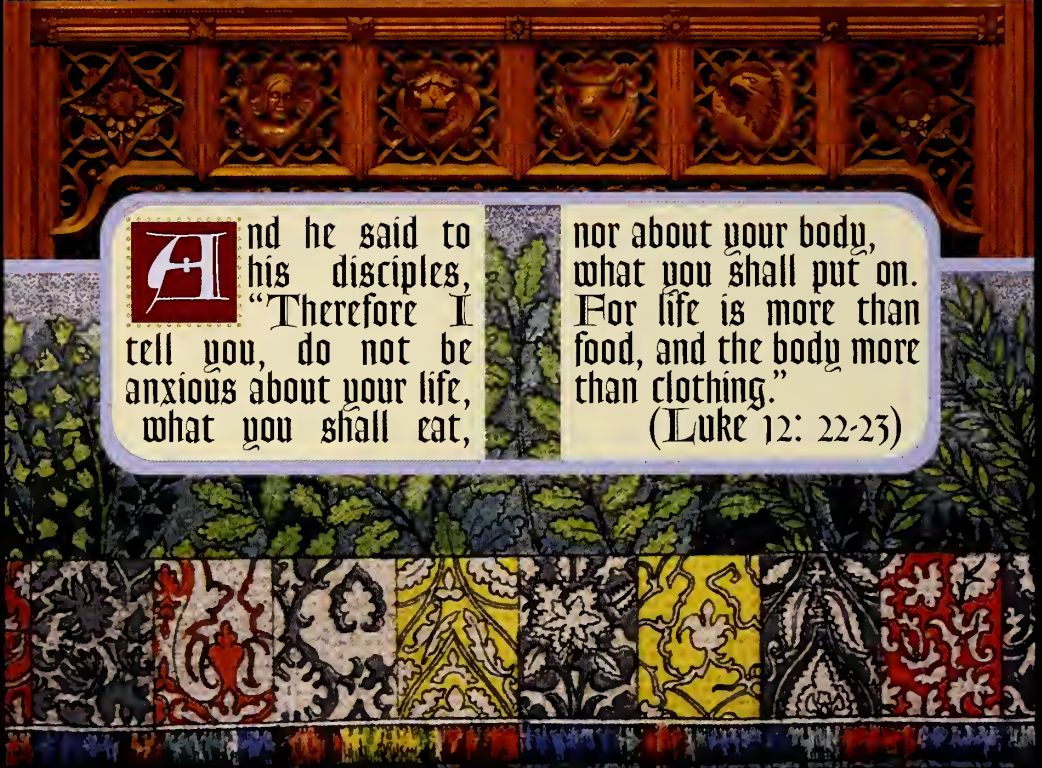
SPEND AND GOD SHALL SEND might have been the first-ever church building campaign slogan. Ramon Lull, (d. 1316) said that it was the adage of his day. Conspicuous waste was, in his words, the “accompaniment to the noble lifestyle” and explained how many of the magnificent Gothic cathedrals were financed. Nearly 300 years later, Francis Bacon wrote, “Of great riches, there is no real use, except it be in the distribution; the rest is but conceit...Riches are for spending; and spending for honour and good actions.” And, throughout the intervening centuries, wealthy patronage has continued to fund exquisite architecture.

In 1925, ten like-minded Methodists saw the possibilities of consolidating two churches (Tryon Street Methodist and Trinity on South Tryon). Between the two congregations, there were 2,500 members with physical assets of a half-million dollars. The newly formed

congregation of Myers Park, with a budget that year of \$8,000 held services at Queen's Chapel. By year's end, charter members numbered 151. With energy and enthusiasm running high during the Roaring 20s, they purchased the Community Store at the fork of Queens and Providence Roads. There they conducted services until 1927 when the Quarterly Conference voted to build a new sanctuary. One of the founding members was its architect; a charter member its builder. Their work was a labor of love.

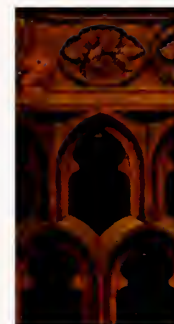
Then, with the stock market crash of October 1929, disaster struck in the form of the Depression.

Myers Park Methodist's 400 members were not spared financial woes and suffered along with the rest of the nation. Annual interest alone on the church debt was \$8,000 — an amount equal to their total budget at the time of their founding. Rescue came in the form of two men: Rev. Richard L. Ownbey and Mr. J. Luther Snyder. Ownbey lifted the congregation's morale and inspired them to persevere through the tough times. Snyder served as Chairman of the Board of Stewards from 1933 to 1935. He was moved to make a gift to the church to the tune of \$115,000, thus funding the construction of an educational building. His generosity motivated the congregation to set themselves to the task of paying off the \$100,000 church debt. A total of \$80,000 was raised in pledges over three years. In March, 1941 the debt was paid, with Mr and Mrs. J. Luther Snyder contributing the last \$10,000.



And he said to
his disciples,
“Therefore I
tell you, do not be
anxious about your life,
what you shall eat,

nor about your body,
what you shall put on.
For life is more than
food, and the body more
than clothing.”
(Luke 12: 22-23)



N WORSHIP, WE STAND for the reading (and hearing) of the Gospel. What is a Gospel? A biography – although the writers never pretended to be unbiased. They reported events which really took place, drawing out the theological significance of what happened, striving to persuade readers to join the movement set in motion by Jesus. As keenly interested as the early Christians were in what Jesus said and did, he was not (to them) merely the greatest teacher ever, or the most spectacular wonder-worker. Among many great teachers, Jesus alone suffered a horrific death – but then did not stay dead.

How interesting it is that we have not one, but four Gospels, which do not fit snugly together like puzzle pieces should. The four versions are a little jagged-edged, and we might wish we had just one coherent narrative of Jesus' life. But the first Christians preferred the four vivid accounts treasured from the beginning, opening themselves to criticism, so obvious were the tensions. But good, deep, meaningful stories are like that. John in particular seems to veer off onto a deeper spiritual plane instead of just sticking with the straight facts; the fourth Gospel was written "by someone who was a very close friend of Jesus, who spent the rest of his life mulling over, more and more deeply, what Jesus had done, praying it through from every angle, and helping others to understand it. Countless people down the centuries have found that, through reading this gospel, the figure of Jesus becomes real for them, full of warmth and light and promise" (Tom Wright).

What do the Gospels tell us about Jesus? He taught, but not merely in pithy little sayings to be cross-stitched or applied like a bandage to a wound. He re-drew the mental map of the universe, turning our perspective on everything inside out. “Blessed are the meek – and blessed are the poor in spirit.” Notice Jesus didn’t say, “Blessed are those who work hard, for they shall have a comfortable retirement.” Jesus did not relax the admittedly tough requirements from his Bible, the Old Testament. You haven’t had an affair? Well if you have felt lust for another, you’re just as guilty. Haven’t murdered anybody? But if you even get angry, at the heart of things it’s the same. Tearing down barns to build bigger barns? You fool! Today your life is required of you (Luke 12:16–21). Haven’t fed the hungry or visited in prisons? Then you are a goat, not a sheep, utterly lost in the final judgment (Matthew 25:31–46). Having a dinner party? Don’t invite those who can return the favor, but go out into the streets and compel the blind, lame, and maimed to sit at your table (Luke 14:7–24). Anyone who says “I take the Bible literally” ought to shudder over this business about dinner invitations.

The signature pieces of Jesus’ teaching are his stories. Jesus was not a systematic theologian, and you get the sense from him that tightly-organized thought somehow misconstrues what the Kingdom of God is about. Jesus never said “There are five logical propositions to which you must give assent,” or “There are five keys to the spiritual life.” Instead he held up a seed in his hand, told about some barns being torn down, bridesmaids running out of oil, sewing a patch onto clothing. Life isn’t like propositions. Life is



like the food you taste, the hand you touch, the house you build.

Defly deploying everyday images from the fields, family and business, the parables reveal what God is up to with this raconteur, while simultaneously throwing a cloak over the head of the confused student. When the disciples ask Jesus why he tells these fascinating but open-ended tales, he responds by explaining how the parables tell the truth for those who ponder slowly, who let the stories infiltrate and do their work on bared souls. Yet the same stories bury the truth for the intelligent who are in a hurry for clarity and simplicity, who wish to master the material, and to remain masters of their lives. Explaining a parable is like explaining a joke, the explanation itself never being funny at all. Clarence Jordan said a parable is like a Trojan Horse; at first it looks harmless, so you let it in, and then – Bam! It's got you.

Jesus' stories don't have a "point," something easily summarized, mastered, and shelved. They speak freshly on each hearing. Consider the well-known "Good Samaritan" parable (Luke 10:29-37), which seems to admonish us to be like the Samaritan, to stop and help those in need, and to avoid the haste of the priest, who was too busy being holy to have compassion on the wounded. But use some imagination and try on other characters for size. Maybe I have been one of the robbers who has hurt someone and left them out on the road. Maybe I am the one who has been beaten, and left for dead, and no one but no one stops to help. St. Augustine and many preachers have read the story this way, and perceived in the foreign traveler – the stranger who spares no expense to help – none other than Jesus himself, the teller of the story.



A tax collector by profession, Matthew was in the midst of counting tax monies when he was called to discipleship.

An angel is often depicted as dictating the gospel to Matthew. Of the four gospels, his is the one said to most emphasize the humanity of Jesus. As a result, Matthew is represented by the symbol of a winged young man or a man's face.



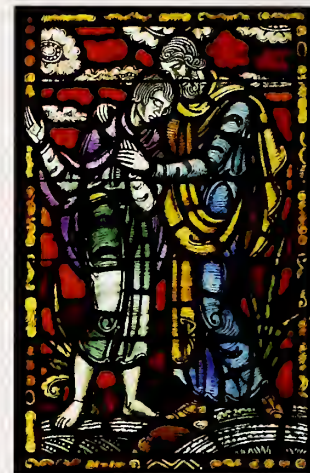
As a symbol, the lion can represent a variety of characteristics from strength, courage, and fortitude to majesty, pride, wrath, and force.

According to the Physiologus, lion cubs were born dead and kept warm by their mothers for three days, at which time the fathers breathed upon them and gave them life. Medieval bestiaries also recorded that the lion slept with its eyes open as a sign of watchfulness and vigilant protection of its family. In the New Testament, the lion was the earthly counterpart of the eagle and a metaphor for Christ's ability to convert the heathen and bring peace.

The winged lion signifies the Gospel of Mark's emphasis on the royal dignity and bloodline of Jesus.

Jesus' stories coyly refrain from telling the feeling or motivations of characters. We have events and words only. And Jesus left most of his stories hanging, open-ended. Did the older son ever come into the party? or did he forever stay outside? The listener is invited to complete the story, to ask "How do I step into this narrative and become part of the denouement?"

But then perhaps "invitation" is too gentle a conception. For there is offense in Jesus' words, and plenty was taken. Times were perilous for all Jews, with botched revolts and iron-fisted retaliation from the Roman overlords, debates about the true nature of the faith. Into such an explosive era Jesus stepped and spoke, daring to redraw precious boundary lines, the very markers that identified the faithful. To consort with prostitutes, to pick grain on the Sabbath, to dine with tax collectors, all were perceived not so much as gross neglect of God's law but as sheer danger for a people whose existence hung by a mere thread. Yet we dare not think of Jesus as lax about holiness. Rather, he redrew the lines and cut to the heart of why there were lines in the first place, daring to include those ostracized by a religiosity aimed at goodness. He dared to offend the righteous, whose goodness could become for them a barrier to God, not to mention an instrument of prejudice. Clearly the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) relaxes no



commandments, but turns up the intensity. It denies us any legalistic wiggle room, probing our souls like a psychologist, cutting to the heart of anger and lust, exposing the rigorous challenge, the profound adventure of living in the light of Christ's coming.

Jesus didn't just talk. He lived an extraordinary life, yet in thoroughly mundane circumstances. We know precious little about his childhood, youth, and early adulthood. Raised in Nazareth, an inconspicuous village whose population may have been as few as a hundred, Jesus was no doubt apprenticed by his father in carpentry. Jesus left work and home behind in response to a sense of mission, first encountering John the Baptist, then moving around the shores of Galilee where he assembled a band of followers.

As he ventured from place to place teaching, he touched the untouchables, fed the hungry, prayed, and served – and perhaps we will never understand him until we do the same. Some of what



he did strikes us as impossible, not only for us to do, but for anybody ever to have done. Many stories about Jesus fall into the category we call "miraculous." Some care is required to contemplate what is miraculous. Sadly, modern people feel they must choose between two options: either the miracles are sheer fiction, devised by the gullible and for simpletons, sensible only to a pre-scientific mindset; or the

The Apostle Luke is remembered as "the beloved physician." However, he was also believed to be an artist and was credited with creating the first images of the Virgin and Child.

The motif of Luke painting Mary and baby Jesus was particularly popular in Flemish Medieval art. Because the ox has special importance as a symbol of the nativity, Luke is denoted by the winged ox.



The eagle symbolized the soaring spirit, justice, generosity, and the virtues of courage, faith, and contemplation. The Physiologus characterized the eagle much like the phoenix who experienced rebirth after flying close to the sun.

Lecterns were once shaped like winged eagles as a sign of the the inspiration of the gospels. The belief that the Gospel of John soared above the other three (due to its philosophical nature), led to the use of the eagle as John's personal insignia.

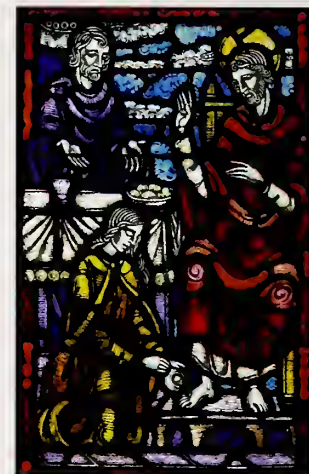
He was referred to as "John the Divine" in recognition of the theological brilliance of his texts which include his Gospel, the Epistles, and the Book of Revelation.



miracles are true, they really happened, with God abrogating the normal rules of how things work, dipping into the usual run of cause and effect, so that the sun actually stands still, the blind regain their sight, the dead live again. And the wire with which some bind up their assertions is barbed, for if you even wonder if Jesus "really" walked on water then you are not a believer at all. Even if you believe the miracles "really" happened, perhaps that was a unique moment in God's history, a proof of who Jesus was, not something we expect to see today; but others are certain that same power is operative, and accessible today.

Certainly God, if there is a God worthy of that name, can do anything. We may scratch our heads and contemplate what would ensue if the sun actually stood still (as in Joshua 10:13), which would mean the earth abruptly halted its rotation, and the inevitable cataclysms geologists and meteorologists could explain. For the moment, though, we may explore a third option, something between the miracles as silly fiction and the miracles as interruptions of natural law.

Philosophically we may question the very category "miraculous." Centuries ago we chalked up much of what transpired – a clap of thunder, sickness, victory in battle – to direct, divine intervention. As knowledge grows, the category "miraculous"





seems to shrink. But should it? Maurice Blondel wrote, “There is nothing more in the miracle than in the least of ordinary facts. But also there is nothing less in the ordinary fact than in the miracle.” From God’s perspective, either everything is a miracle, or nothing is a miracle; the world and all that transpires within it is of God, and that grand fact stirs in us what Martin Buber called “an abiding astonishment,” a sense of wonder. Onlookers were astonished by what Jesus did, whether he calmed a storm or touched a leper, whether he multiplied five loaves into food for thousands or let a sinful woman wash his feet with her hair. An excited frenzy rifled through the crowds that saw Jesus, a frenzy he sought to quiet.

And why this hesitancy to dazzle the throngs with his power? Jesus perhaps sensed that the sheer exercise of miraculous power would be misconstrued, that people would pin their fantasies on him, that the unscrupulous would devise plans to capitalize on this wizardry. And there were other miracle workers, at the many shrines of Asclepius, in the wonder-working of Hanina ben Dosa and Honi the Circledrawer from Jesus’ own era and region.

But more to the point, Jesus evidently performed whatever “miracles” he performed, not to impress anybody with his power, but to teach a lesson. During Jesus’ lifetime, plenty of people still got

sick, and limped, and suffered, and died. He did not heal everyone. And, at least as far as we know, he rarely healed in private. He healed in front of a crowd, and he always attached a sermon, a point to the miracle.



The blind were his favorites. Blindness as a metaphor for not being able to comprehend truth, as an image for a failure of the imagination, was not unique to the Bible. Plenty of thinkers used blindness, which was far more prevalent in ancient times than our own, as an illustration of intellectual or spiritual confusion. Sophocles’ drama, *Oedipus Rex*, is a riveting exploration of how and what and why we see and don’t see. In the royal house of Thebes, Oedipus boasts, “I would be blind to misery not to pity my people.” It is Tiresias, the blind prophet, who accurately assesses the situation. Ridiculed by Oedipus, he responds: “You mock my blindness? You with your precious eyes, you’re blind to the corruption in your life.” Just so, as the blind were healed, Jesus turned to the mortified Pharisees, the great see-ers and visionaries, and rudely sug-

gested that they were the blind who needed healing.

The ultimate agenda in this ministry of healing would not be health and physical well-being, but rather salvation itself. Jürgen Moltmann put it well:

In the context of the new creation, these 'miracles' are not miracles at all. They are merely the fore-tokens of the all-comprehensive salvation, the unscathed world, and the glory of God. They point to the bodily character of salvation and to the God who loves earthly life... There is a difference between salvation and healing: Healing vanquishes illness and creates health. Yet it does not vanquish the power of death. But salvation in its full and completed form is the annihilation of the power of death and the raising of men and women to eternal life. In this wider sense of salvation... people are healed not through Jesus' miracles, but through Jesus' wounds; that is, they are gathered into the indestructible love of God.

Yet, as we attend to the "point" of a miracle, we need not infer that nothing of wonder happened. A story is no less true for being symbolic!

At the heart of the Gospel narratives is a protracted battle against evil, and therefore for God. At his birth, a paranoid Herod slaughtered innocent children, sounding the harsh note that would recur in skirmish after skirmish. Jesus went into the wilderness, willingly enduring more than hunger and exposure, but severe temptation, a harrowing test.

Public controversy surrounding modern productions, such as Martin Scorsese's film, *The Last Temptation of Christ* or even Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar*, hints that we are not





comfortable with Jesus' humanity; many Christians adore the notion that he was "without sin" more than his being "tempted in every way" (Hebrews 2:18).

His sorest temptation had to be to steer clear of Jerusalem. No supernatural gift to foretell the future would have been needed for Jesus to recognize the deadly danger he would face. Frequently we ask, "Why did Jesus die?" – and the answer seems to be "For our sins." But we may shift the question just a little and inquire, "Why did they kill him?" – and the answer is no longer "For our sins." They killed him for complex and very understandable reasons. At Passover the city was engulfed with hundreds of thousands of pilgrims; security measures were more intense than usual. Jewish religious leaders had good reason to feel threatened by this itinerant healer whose Trojan Horse stories challenged their authority. The Roman authorities, under the brutal Pontius Pilate, were more than skittish about the potential for armed revolution. Jesus' every action – those he befriended, his failure to curtsy to the powers that be, and his startlingly bold and offensive act of driving the moneychangers from the temple precincts – all led precipitously to a contrived "trial" and execution, an untimely and gruesome end for a thirty-year-old teacher.

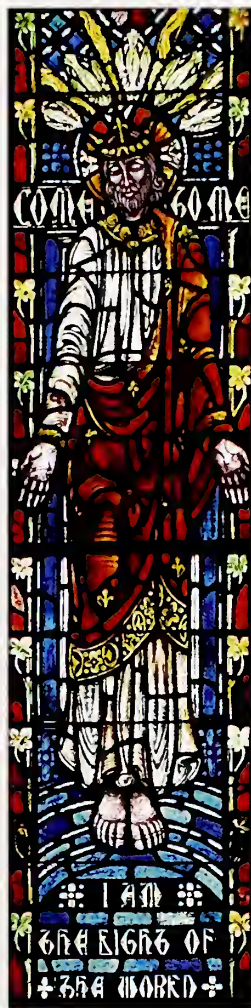
Notice the remarkable shift in Jesus' ministry from dizzying activity to a taciturn passivity, from conquering every foe to being conquered, from breathing life into a deceased child to breathing his last. Jesus acts, but then Jesus doesn't act; is acted upon, but is no less himself when he is arrested, bound, suffering, and dying. In fact, it is in the dramatic moments when Jesus

becomes helpless that we discover the startling nature of his power, and therefore the shape of our salvation.

All four Gospels devote themselves at great length to the details of the crucifixion of Jesus, so much so that some scholars regard the Gospels as basically narratives about the trial and death, to which some stories from Jesus' earlier life were attached. And of course, we also find stories from his brief, subsequent life: the first Christians believed that Jesus was raised from the dead, that he was no longer in that grave, and they were transformed from fearful, unlettered fishermen into giants who changed the world. This is no afterthought; all of Christianity hinges on the resurrection of Jesus, as the truth of the faith is enveloped in the discovery that "He is not here; he is risen!"

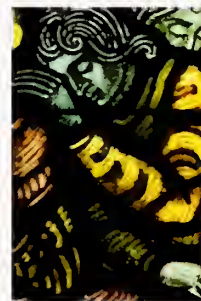
Given the centrality of the resurrection, we may pause and scratch our heads over what we in fact find in the Gospels about the resurrection. For there is no sign whatsoever that this story has been "managed" or even told carefully at all. Who really got to the tomb first? And to whom did Jesus appear? Did he appear just outside the tomb? or was it up in Galilee? The four narratives of the resurrection are impossible to fit together into a coherent "harmony."

Charles Colson once argued that the story of the resurrection must be true, since even a smaller number of Watergate crooks couldn't keep their stories



straight and wound up exposing Nixon as a liar; had the resurrection been fabricated, some bumbling disciple would have leaked the information. The issue actually is different. Surprisingly, almost embarrassingly, several stories – seemingly self-contradictory, mutually exclusive, somewhat incoherent, and not at all “kept straight” – were allowed to stand. The contradictions shout out in the open, as if begging for critics to scoff. Almost as if the fact of the matter were so contradictory to life as we know it that the feeble efforts to put it into words had to seem crazed, just as Luke characterizes the reaction to the women’s breathless report of the empty tomb: “These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them” (Luke 24:12). The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once asked why these texts were so unclear. He compared the situation to someone wanting to warn someone of a terrible danger, but telling them a riddle. “Isn’t it possible that it was essential in this case to tell a riddle?” Wittgenstein wisely asked, as if a riddle were the clearest way to convey this particular kind of truth. An empty tomb. Conflicting accounts. Rumors of meetings. Doubts, surprises, but a powerful message. This Jesus, reared in Nazareth, itinerant preacher, quiet healer, offense to the pious, scandalously executed, could not be contained by the grave.





WHEN

MARTIN LUTHER WAS ASKED how the Protestant Reformation happened, and specifically what he had done to make it happen, he slyly replied, “I think it happened when I was sleeping, or drinking Wittenburg beer with my friends Phillip and Amsdorf. I did nothing. The Word did everything.”

From the beginning, Christians have experienced the power of the spoken word. We notice that God works by speaking. At creation, God said, “Let there be light.” To the demons ravaging a man’s soul, Jesus commanded, “Come out of him!” Jesus spoke to the raging storm, “Be still.” At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus said “Come forth.” Spoken words matter. We come to church with much on our hearts, but always wondering, “Is there any word from the Lord?”

And there is. God ordained that, when Christians gather for worship, words will be spoken, and heard, and that in hearing the words, God’s Word will be overheard. Writing to the Romans, Paul declared that “every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed?



And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!’” (Romans 10:13–15). God has sent preachers, and we are grateful. Are their feet really lovely? Does God’s Word depend upon the loveliness of the sermon? or isn’t it the wonder of wonders that God takes the preacher’s words, whether wise or foolish, whether articulate or fumbling, and uses them to penetrate the soul and lure us to call upon the name of the Lord and be saved?

Jesus was all about humility, life, love, hearing and learning – which is why Luther was entirely confident in the power of the Word. One day, Luther was at home. Surveying the chaos of his household, with six children, aged four to twelve, behaving – well, behaving the way children behave... Luther felt his exasperation and thought back to what Jesus said: “Unless you become like children you will never enter the kingdom of God.” Shaking his head, he mused, “Christ said we must become as little children to enter the kingdom? Dear God, this is too much. Must we become such idiots?”

Preachers can glamorize children as being pure, sweet, naïve, good, and loving – and they are. But perhaps the more prickly side of childhood can reveal to us something about the Christian life. Jesus, after all, came, not wielding titanic power, but as an infant. A thicket of analogies present themselves: children are demanding, they want a response *now*, they brook no rivals. Paul had no desire to please people; he spoke boldly, frankly. We

pray to God now, we speak frankly with God and each other, we don't live to please others in the world. Children harbor no illusion that they can make it on their own; they do not hoist the world on their shoulders and pretend to be Atlas. They are dependent, they have to trust, they know that venturing off without mom and dad is scary and foolish. Children do not hesitate to shed a tear or two.

Isn't the Church the haven for infants? The novelist Mary Gordon, when asked what she appreciates most about Church, answered "I like being in a place where no one has to deserve being there." Infants have not had time to deserve anything. Yet we love them. It is all grace – and perhaps a bit foolish for us as we get older. We are God's infants, and if you live up to the name, you'll miss a few parties; you won't get invited certain places. Most adults on the prowl for a quiet evening

prefer peace and quiet and therefore will not get near the baby. It's okay. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the wise wizard Gandalf told the hobbits, "Let folly be our cloak." Folly worked pretty well for Jesus, Paul, St. Francis and a holy host of others – or we might say it didn't "work well," but it was faithful, and strangely powerful, but in an infant, toddling kind of way.

Nearly two centuries before Luther's Reformation, John Wyclif translated the Bible into English – an idea so revolutionary that he was persecuted for doing so! He expounded what he

called "a new doctrine: the right of every person to examine the Bible for himself." Worship is not a replacement for examining the Bible for ourselves; rather worship guides us in our examination, spurs us to deeper examination, plops us on a pew next to others doing some examining.

Yet we remember that when we delve into Scripture's pages, we find the world turned upside down – and even the

Church itself is questioned. Wyclif felt the Church should be stripped of its endowments, which should be distributed to the poor. Worship catapults us out of the pews and into the streets. John Wesley, founder of Methodism and heroic evangelist, preached not merely in comfortable sanctuaries, but out in the fields, on the streets, in coal mines, in prisons. We don't "get" worship until we get busy, until we carry the message out there, and the world has to sit up and take

notice that Church is going on somewhere.

Why does it matter? What is at the heart of it all – our life in worship, our life as an extension of worship? Robert Coles, who teaches at Harvard, had the privilege of interviewing Dorothy Day shortly before her death. Coles asked her if she would jot down something of an autobiography, to tell about her life. She tried for days, but came up with nothing – except these words: "I just sat there and thought of our Lord, and His visit to us all those centuries ago, and I said to myself that my great luck was to have had

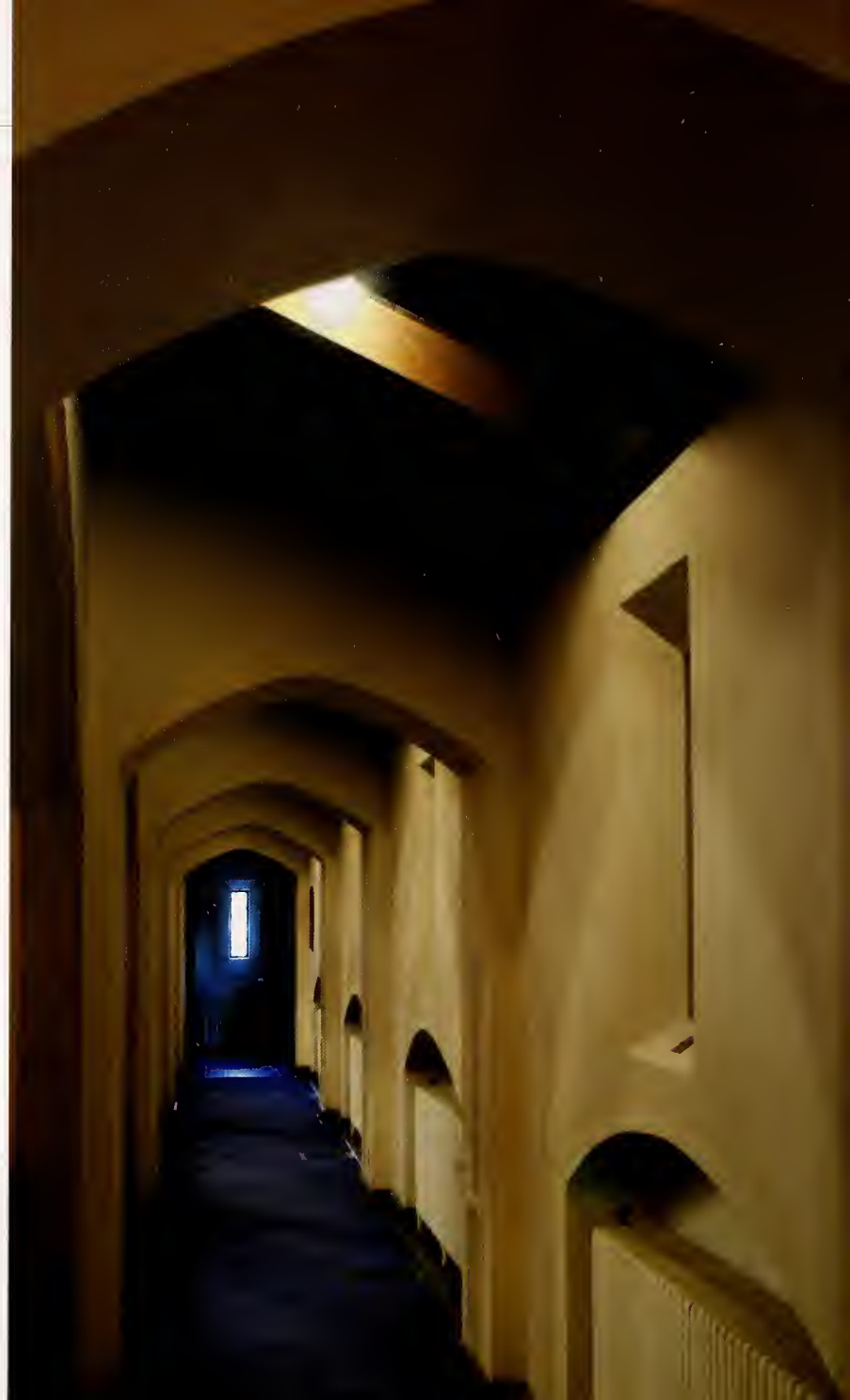




Him on my mind for so long in my life.”

Just imagine, maximizing the amount of time you have Jesus on your mind. And not some Jesus we invent to suit our biases. The one who visited centuries ago, who told stories that catch you off guard like a Trojan horse, who hung out with the despised people and raised a questioning eyebrow at those grim, self-righteous people, who crumpled up the map of how we think and with some spiritually shrewd origami pointed us in a new direction. The Jesus who loved us – you – so much that he did not shrink from a horribly painful, shameful, lonely death, so that no matter how bad things get for you, he knows. He cares, from the inside. The Jesus whom God refused to leave alone in his tomb. The Jesus who lives, mysteriously, wonderfully, and still says to me, to you, to us together, “Follow me.”

The sermon isn’t a speech that we critique. The sermon isn’t a pillow of thoughts on which I might relax. The sermon isn’t a history lesson, a tour of some museum of religious relics. The sermon hunts for the intersection of what God did (and therefore what God is like in God’s heart) and life today, here, now. When we together walk toward that intersection, God’s Word guides us, keeps us on the right road. “Thy Word is a lamp for my feet, a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). Lamps in Bible times were pottery pieces, and when kids see them now they think of Aladdin’s lamp. But the Bible isn’t something we rub to get the genie to come out and hear our three wishes! This lamp is a flicker in the darkness,



a candle that banishes the darkness, and the light illumines the mind, the shadows flee.

Over time, something happens, I am reshaped, you are transformed, we are not who we used to be. Paul wrote, “Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed... that you may prove what is the will of God” (Romans 12:2). We are such conformists. We want to fit in, to belong; we want our children to be normal – and this conformity is our ruin. In our decadent culture you should pray and work tirelessly to be weird, to be sure you are out of sync with what is cool and chic, to have children who are not exactly normal. In worship, we are resculpted into someone a bit strange, someone that however awkwardly reflects the image of God.

Perhaps the most pregnant moments in worship are those fleeting silences, between the words, when we pause, think, listen. Silence is the space where the Spirit blows, and then we hear, we think in reply, and God becomes palpable. Change begins. Hope is birthed. We rediscover our truest self.

An interviewer once asked Mother Teresa, “Why are you so holy?” She responded, “You talk as if holiness were weird or abnormal. To be holy is to be normal. To be anything else is to be abnormal.” We are called to be holy, to be pure, clean, good, so that our mind is like a clear piece of glass through which God’s mind can be glimpsed. Every thought, every attitude, my resentments, my dreams, my



most private curiosities, even my unacknowledged inner craziness: all should and can be swept up into God’s loving, changing grace. We pray, “Whatever is in my head, in my heart, O God, I want it to be of you.”

The transformed life is a gift of God; I try not to block it, I get out of the way, and let God live in me, through me. And I trust that a changed life takes some time, maybe a lifetime. Today I look up and I’m better, thank God. But then I discover some unconverted dark corner, down in my guts somewhere. I give that to God – only to find another habit that needs changing. I give that to God – only to find an attitude that is ugly... and so it goes. This is not an endless frustration, but the delight of the spiritual quest to be transformed, to be holy, to be different, to build stone by stone the temple of myself that will not be too embarrassed to discover the Spirit of God has taken up residence – even in me...

And then, we bolt into the world as changed people – like those disciples long ago, like countless missionaries who fanned out all over the globe (and obscure men and women who left their huts and took their faith into little villages), like members of Myers Park Methodist since the 1920’s. Worship matters. The world isn’t what it would be if we hadn’t been worshipping here this past century.

Some of the most fascinating stories – and even if they are legends, they are superb legends – are told about Thomas, the disciple who doubted. Evidently doubting



isn't a permanent scar on the spiritual record, for Thomas eventually believed, and when he did he traveled further and more courageously than any of the disciples. Venturing east, into unknown, exotic lands, Thomas found his way to India – and while we do not know all the details, we know that from very early times there were pockets of Christians living in thriving communities of faith in the most unlikely of places.

It is one thing to try to share the Gospel with people like you, but it is another to dip into an entirely different culture. While the Protestant Reformation was going on in Europe, Catholics, led by St. Francis Xavier, journeyed to China and then Japan, achieving startling success – and then finding themselves targeted by ferocious persecution. Little wonder those Jesuits thought of themselves as soldiers.

“Onward, Christian Soldiers!” was a favorite hymn for

decades. Many theologians have objected to the militant image, and the hymn was dropped from the most recent hymnals. But the Bible frequently thinks of the life of faith in terms of the life of the soldier. Paul said “Put on the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6). One of the most hopeful hymns of the Church declares:

*The strife is o'er, the battle done;
the victory of life is won;
the song of triumph has begun.*

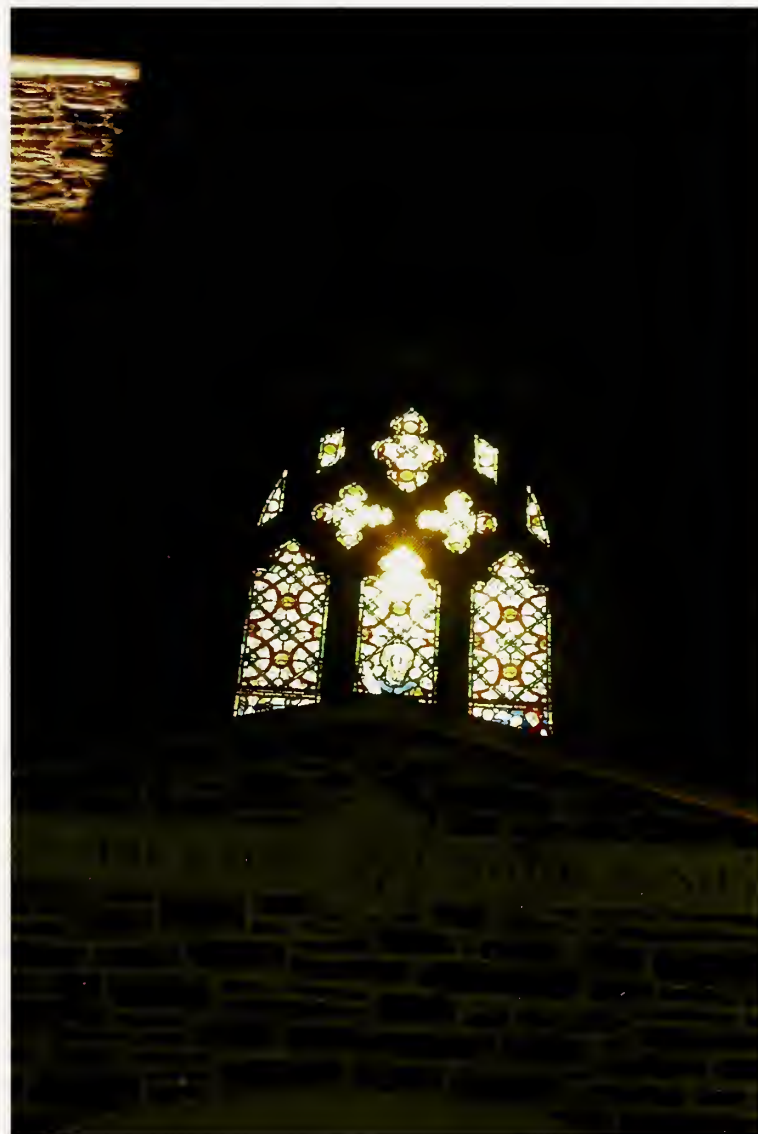
Soldiers never go into battle without extensive training – just as Christians need training to live in the world. While superintendent at West Point, Douglas MacArthur composed these words which were carved on the stone entrance to the gymnasium: “Upon the fields of friendly strife are sown the seeds that,



upon other fields on other days will bear the fruits of victory.” In worship we train, we study, we practice, and then we are prepared out there for what can really be a battle – but we are strong, knowing we are not alone, armed with the armor of God.

The most poignant drama of the soldier’s life is in the homecoming. Just imagine, after World War II, soldiers from families in our own Church pulling into Charlotte on the bus, descending the steps, mother, father, sister, girlfriend waiting, leaping, laughing, hugging, kissing, weeping. Of course, others wept because their sons did not come home. Boys, the promise of tomorrow, lost, sacrificed on the fields of Europe, on the seas of the Pacific. Families gathered in this sanctuary for memorial services, and parents, siblings, and friends knelt in the privacy of their grief and wept before God over those who were lost.

But we anticipate a homecoming even for them: that they (and all whom we have loved and lost) will be gathered home to live with God forever, and that we will see them once again. Allesandro, the wily World War I veteran in Mark Helprin’s novel, *Soldier of the Great War*, as he lay dying, prayed with his last breath, “Dear God, I ask of you only one thing. Let me join the ones I love. Carry me to them, unite me with them, let me see them, let me touch them.”





The fellowship of the
Holy Spirit be with
you all (2 Corinthians 13:14)



ONE OF THE OLDEST, most precious archaeological finds from ancient Israel is a miniature scroll bearing these words from the book of Numbers:

*The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you.
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.*

These famous words are known as the “priestly benediction,” which were uttered as a blessing as worshippers would begin to exit the sanctuary for the arduous journey home, and for life “in between” the high moments of worship.

Another hymn they would sing as they would pack up their tents and make their way out of the holy city of Jerusalem was Psalm 121:

*I lift up my eyes to the hills.
 From whence does my help come?
 My help comes from the Lord,
 who made heaven and earth.
 He will not let your foot be moved,
 he who keeps you will not slumber.
 The Lord is your keeper;
 the Lord is your shade on your right hand.
 The sun shall not smite you by day,
 nor the moon by night.
 The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
 from this time forth and for evermore.*



When Paul signed off on his letters to the earliest Christians in far-flung places, he closed with special words, such as

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
 and the love of God
 and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*
 (2 Corinthians 13:14)

Words matter, and especially the last words we speak to each other. At the end of worship, we hear brief words of blessing, acknowledging that worship isn't the end but the beginning, and the beginning of something that will be challenging, jarring, as we find ourselves out in a world that isn't entirely in sync with God. Out there, we need the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we need the love of God – and especially we need the fellowship of the Spirit, and of each other.

When we part from someone who matters, we never just walk away. We shake hands, we embrace, we kiss, and we say “Goodbye, I will see you again, I will miss you, please call.” Bonds weave us together, even when we are no longer together. Even if our pledge, “I will see you again,” proves to be impossible – as things happen, and we are separated. Death separates, but in the Church we long for that mystical togetherness that can never die. We hold hands and sing the great hymn of John Fawcett from the 18th century:

*Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.*

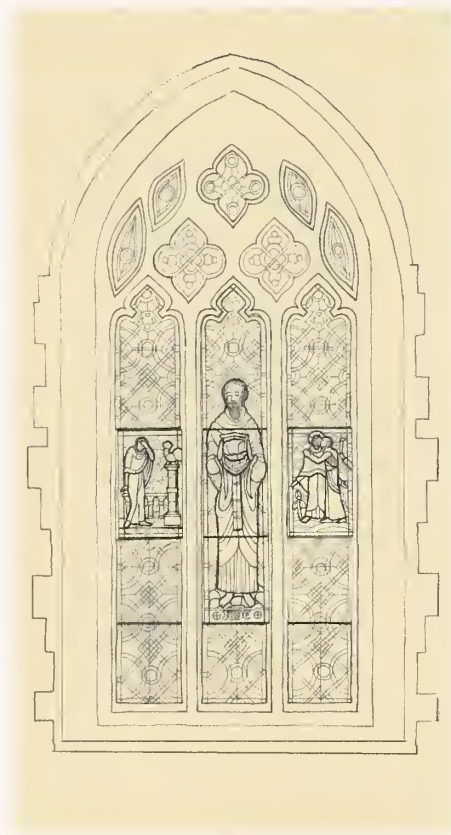
*Before our Father's throne
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one
Our comforts and our cares.*

*We share each other's woes,
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.*

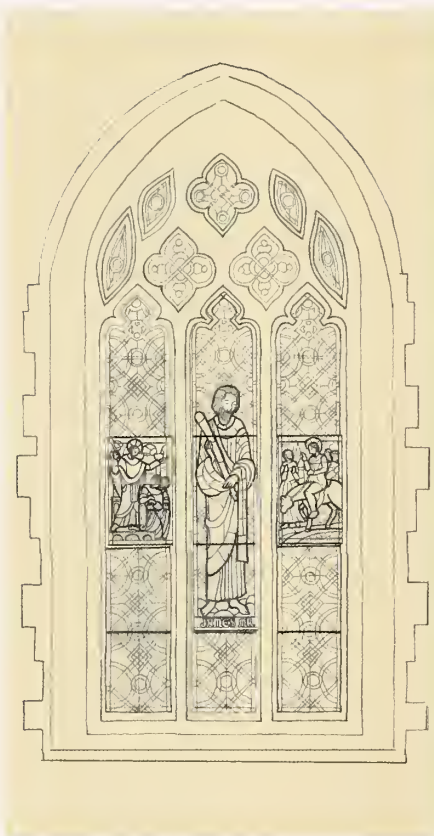
*When we asunder part,
It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart,
And hope to meet again.*



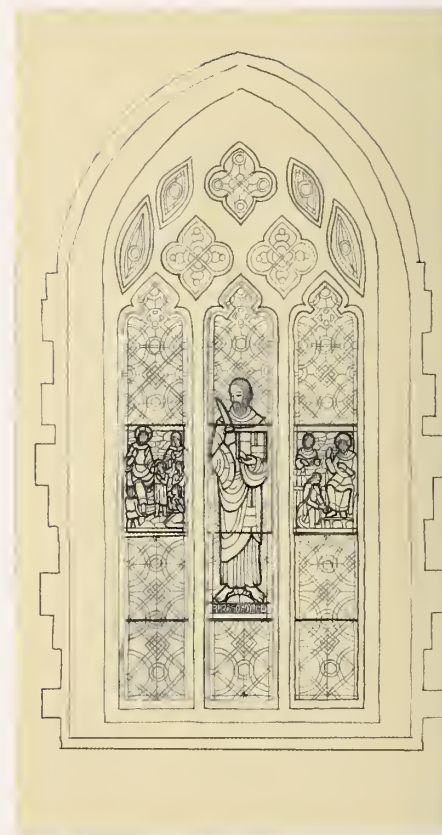
APOSTLE WINDOWS – PROVIDENCE ROAD CLERESTORY – FROM BALCONY TO CHANCEL



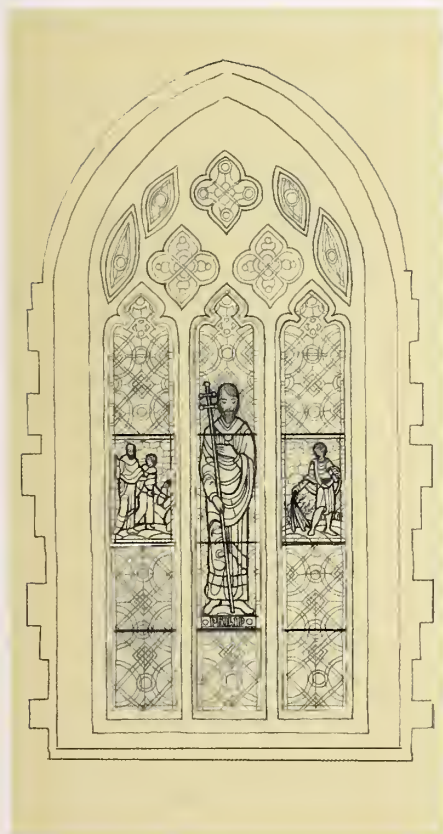
JUDE
holds a ship;
denial by Peter;
betrayal by Judas.



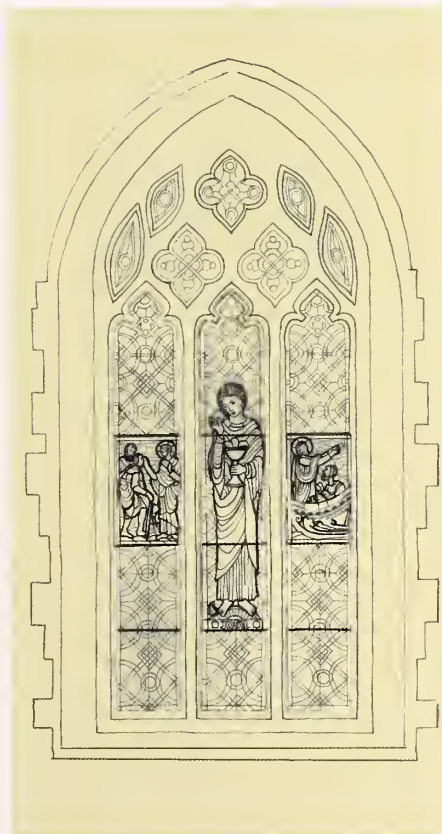
JAMES THE MINOR
with fuller's bat in his hand;
cleansing of the Temple;
triumphal entry into Jerusalem.



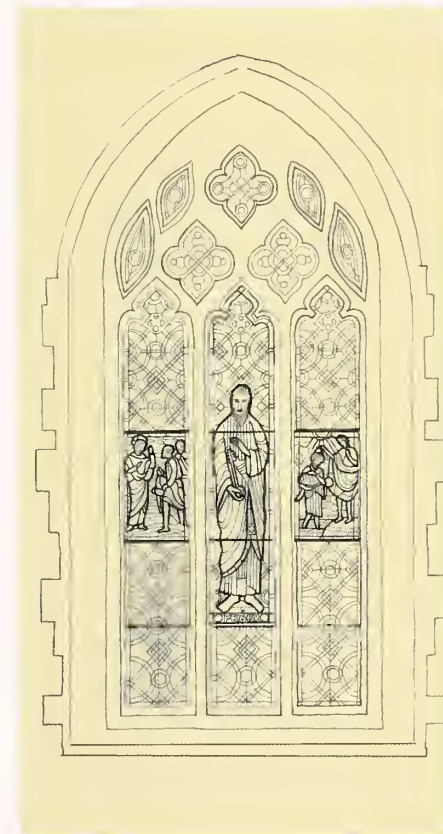
BARTHOLOMEW
with flaying knife and book;
Jesus and children;
women anointing Jesus' feet.



PHILIP
with staff;
parable of wheat and tares;
parable of the sower.

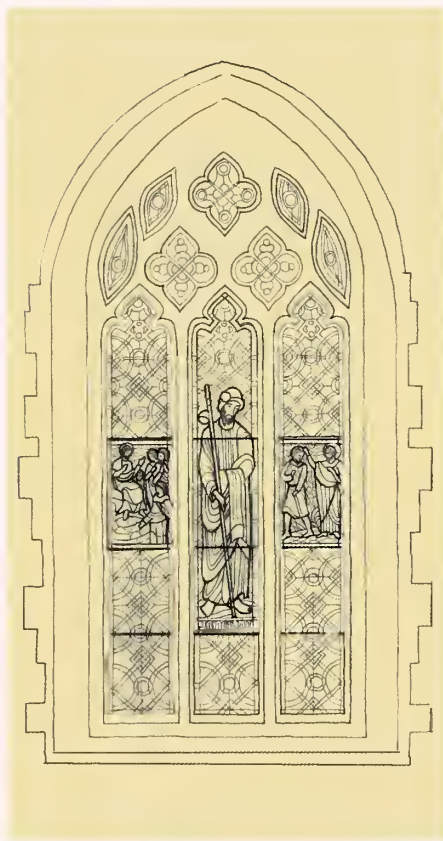


JOHN
with cup and serpent;
Jesus healing blind man;
Jesus stills the tempest.

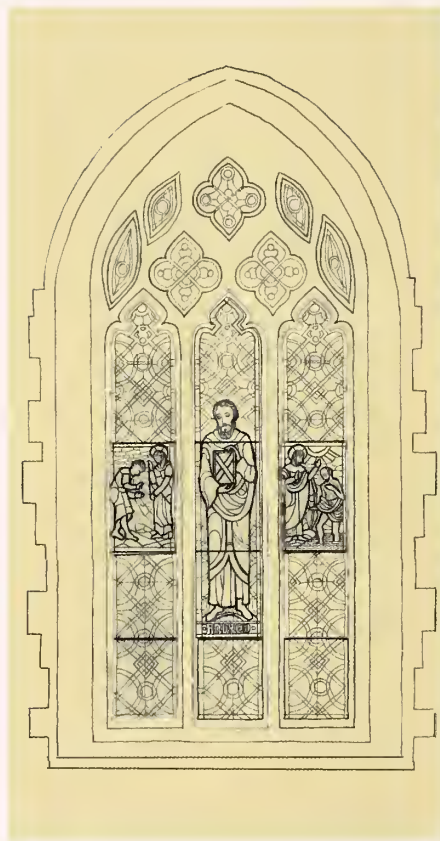


PETER
holds a key;
the calling of Peter and Andrew;
baptism of Jesus by John.

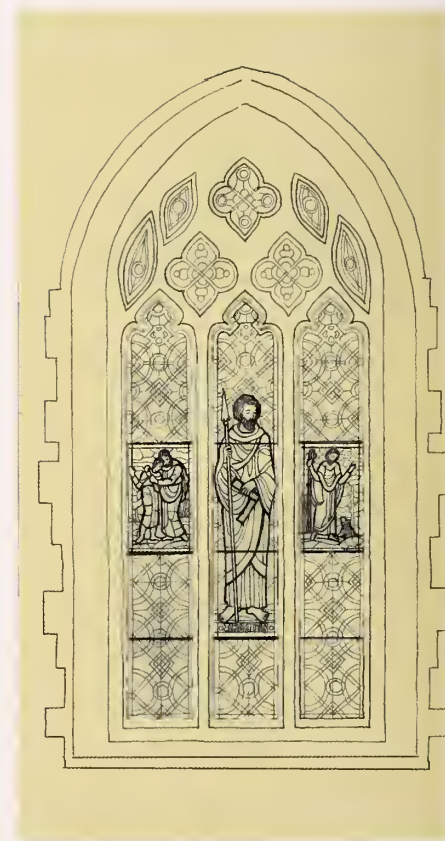
APOSTLE WINDOWS – QUEENS ROAD CLERESTORY – FROM CHANCEL TO BALCONY



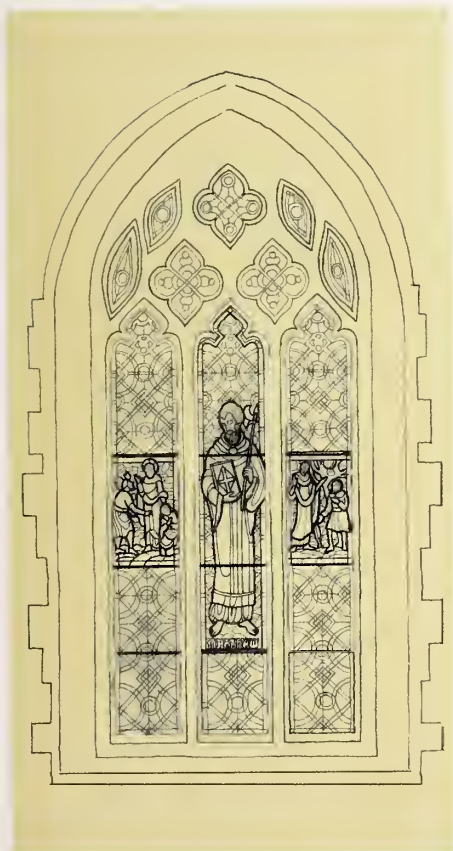
JAMES THE MAJOR
holds a pilgrim staff;
Jesus and woman at the well;
temptations of Jesus.



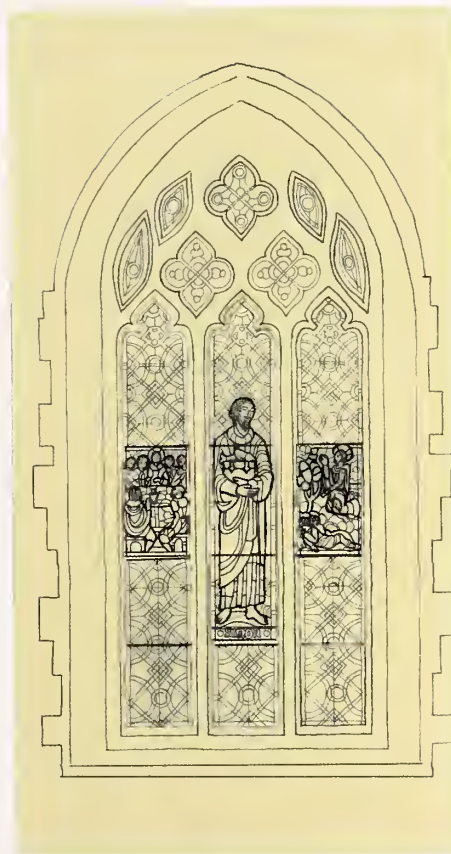
ANDREW
holds a shield with cross;
Jesus expels demons;
raising Lazarus from the dead.



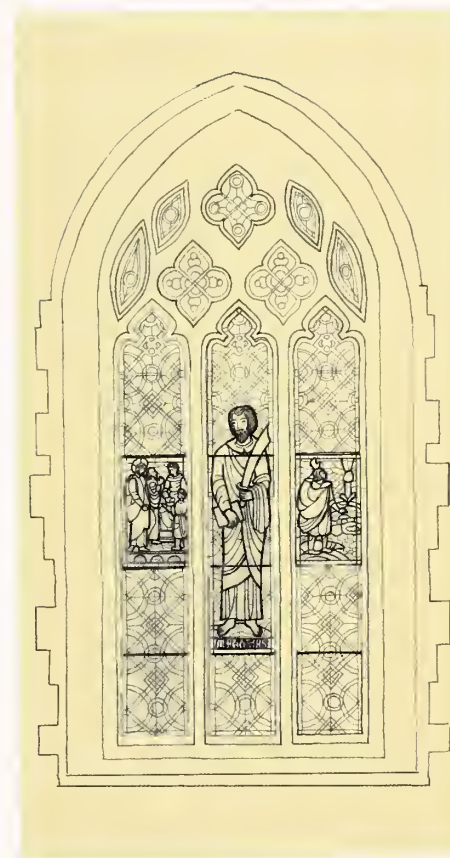
THOMAS
holds a spear and builder's square;
prodigal son;
lost sheep.



MATTHEW
holds a battle ax;
Jesus and the sinful woman;
Jesus and Zaccheus.



SIMON THE ZEALOT
holds the Bible with a fish
(symbolizing Christ) atop it;
Last Supper;
Garden of Gethsemane.



MATTHIAS
holds scimitar and a book;
Jesus before Pilate;
Crucifixion.

SEVEN VIRTUES WINDOW

SOLDIER • FLAG • SAILOR

ALPHA • OMEGA

JUSTICE • HUMILITY • COURAGE • DIVINITY • FAITH • HOPE • CHARITY

SCALES
OF
JUSTICE

DONKEY
FOR
HUMILITY

ANGEL • ANGEL • ANGEL

ANCHOR
FOR
HOPE

PURSE
FOR
CHARITY

MARTIN LUTHER • ST. FRANCIS • STEPHEN • CHRIST • PAUL • WYCLIF • WESLEY

LEADER OF THE
REFORMATION

OF ASSISI

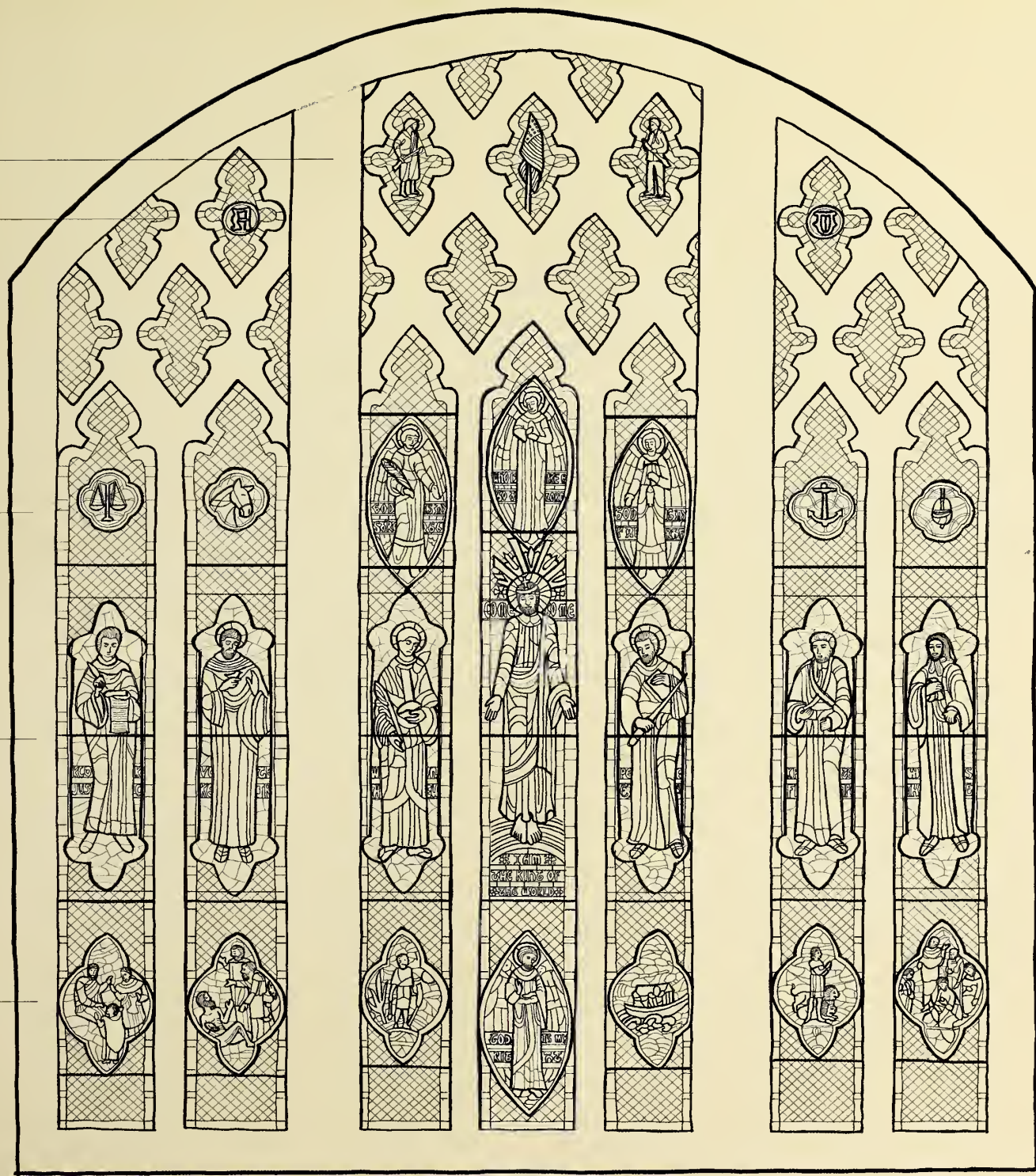
FIRST
CHRISTIAN
MARTYR

THE
APOSTLE

TRANSLATOR
OF THE
BIBLE

FOUNDER
OF
METHODISM


KING SOLOMON • FEEDING THE POOR • DAVID • ANGEL • ARK • DANIEL • DEBTORS PRISON







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